

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

GENESISシリーズ

境界線 上の ホライゾン

きみとあさまで

IV
下



特-8

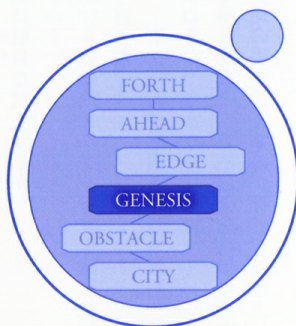


GENESISシリーズ境界線上のホライゾン
きみとあさまでⅣ〈下〉

川上 稔

特典文庫

BCXA
0417



The 1st.GENESIS

NOT FOR SALE



かわかみ みのる
川上 稔

1975年1月3日生まれ。東京出身。ひと月おきの特典小説執筆を見事に完走。ひと休みするどころか、この経験を本編に活かせないものかと、いろいろと模索しているそうで……。

【特典文庫】

GENESISシリーズ境界線上のホライゾン

きみとあさまでⅠ〈上〉〈下〉
きみとあさまでⅡ〈上〉〈下〉
きみとあさまでⅢ〈上〉〈下〉
きみとあさまでⅣ〈上〉〈下〉

【電撃文庫】

GENESISシリーズ

境界線上のホライゾンⅠ〈上〉〈下〉
境界線上のホライゾンⅡ〈上〉〈下〉
境界線上のホライゾンⅢ〈上〉〈中〉〈下〉
境界線上のホライゾンⅣ〈上〉〈中〉〈下〉
境界線上のホライゾンⅤ〈上〉〈下〉

イラスト:さとやす(TENKY)

栃木生まれの山形育ち「最近太りました。もう少しウオーキングの距離増やそうと思います」しかし、時代は花粉へと……。

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カバー／旭印刷

『君と私で朝待ち娘』

浅間あきまは、浅間神社から表層部に上る階段を昇りながらこう思った。

……このままだと遅刻じゃないでしょうか。

元々が、いつものペースで朝の準備をしていたところに、馬鹿ばかが狼連ろうれんれて降って来て背中を尻しりまで舐めたのだ。言葉にしている、これは恐らく一般の生活ではありえないことだと思っただが、うちではあり得るから結局どうしようもない。

しかし、時間のマージンはとってあるとはいえ、着替えを乾かしたり食事を用意したのはままずかった。流石さすがに遅れは充分で、表層部に上ると八時二十分を過ぎていた。

じゃあ仕方ない、と、右舷側の通りを歩き出すこちらの左右に、ミトツダイヤと喜美きみが並んでくる。ミトツダイヤが髪を風に流しながら、

「——智ち？ 急がなくて大丈夫ですか？」

「はい。二人がいれば大丈夫ですよ」

「フフ、そうなの？ 心強さの素もとになれて幸いだよ」

「ええ、ミトと喜美がいれば、遅刻の原因を先生に説明するとき、被害者枠と加害者枠がしっかり埋まった状態で話せますので」

喜美がいきなり全力タッシュで教導院の方に走り出した。あ、と思うこちらの視線の先、馬鹿ばか姉は走りながらスピン付きで振り向いて、

「フフフ！ アンタ達は遅刻するといいわ！ 私だけは死んでも救かる御予定よ！」

「あ、こら、待ちなさい！」

「あらあら、誰が待つて言うの？ お馬鹿ばかさん。二人して後から巨乳きょにゅう揺らし……、ミトツダイヤがそれじゃ無理ね……、まあいいわ、そんな感じで！」

「何言ってるか解りませんわよー！」

ともあれ走り出す。先行するアスリートが本気タッシュなので加速術式でも使いたくなるが、今日の体育は模擬戦だ。押気おしきの消費は避けたい。

無論、疲れても模擬戦は駄目な気がするが、

「こら、喜美、待ちなさい！」

何が楽しいのか、鼻歌付きの高速スキップ+身を回して行く喜美を追う。そんなこちらの横で、ミトツダイヤがこう言った。

「これ、端はなから見たら、——女三人が早朝からじゃれあって追いかけて、という青春のコマに美化されてますわよねキャッキャウフフ系の」

そうですねー、と肩を落とすなり、自然区画を抜けた。教導院に通じる通りに入る。

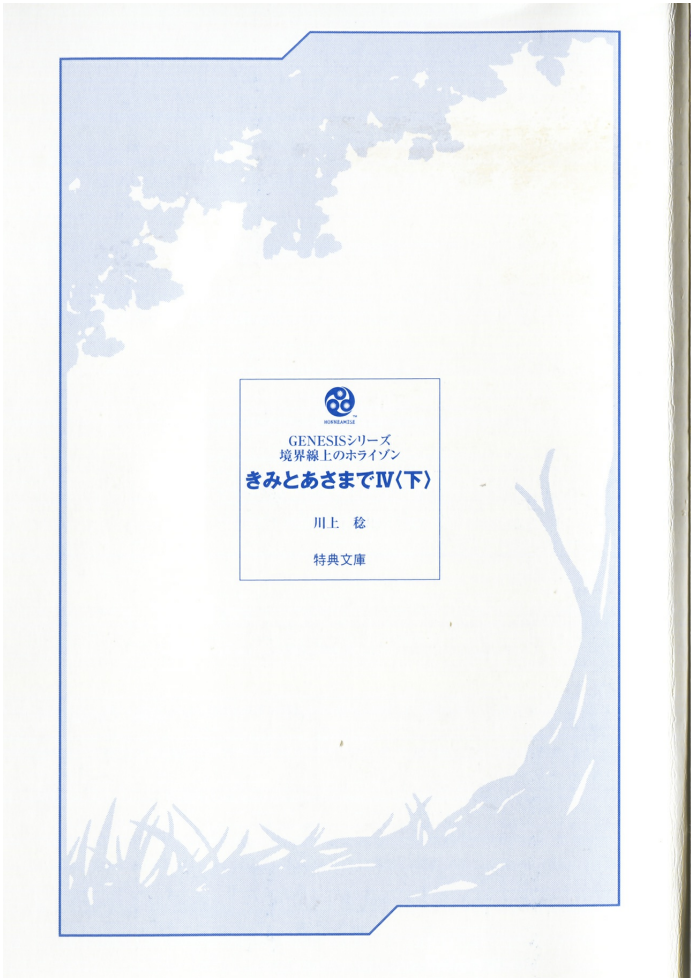
予鈴よすずぎりぎりを狙う生徒の姿が見え始め、そして階段上に、

「——あ」

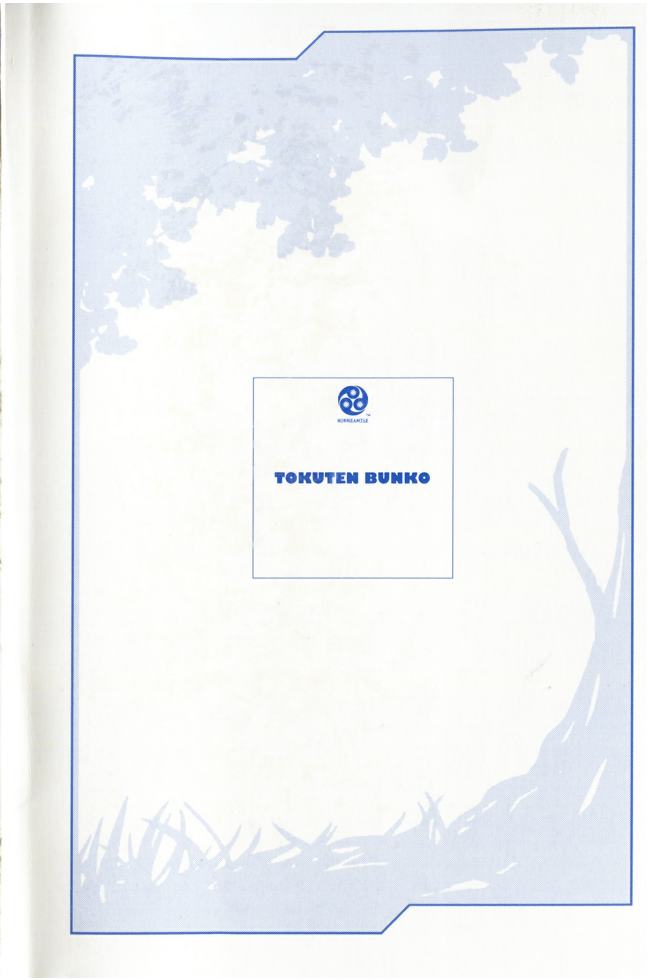
皆が待つていた。そうだ。模擬戦は市街を使うので、橋上集合なのだ。

だから浅間は急いだ。予鈴が鳴り出した空の下。喜美の前に、ミトツダイヤと共に、彼や皆に肩を並べに行き、出席を取りだしたオリオトライに、

「——お待たせしました！ 浅間・智、ここにいます！」



GENESISシリーズ 境界線上のホライゾン
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Inside Story

We Are Girls Awaiting the Morning

Asama had a thought as she climbed the stairs from the Asama Shrine to the surface area.

...We're not going to be late, are we?

Her morning routine had been on its usual pace when an idiot had fallen from the sky with a wolf in tow and licked her from the back to the butt. She doubted most people lived lives that could be described like that, but in her life it was entirely possible.

However, even with some extra time built into her schedule, taking the time to dry her clothes and cook breakfast had been a mistake. She was running quite late and it was past 8:20 when she reached the surface area.

Since she was going to be late either way, she decided to walk along the starboard road. Mitotsudaira and Kimi walked up on either side and the former asked a question with her hair blowing in the wind.

"...Tomo? Don't you have to hurry?"

"No. Having you two with me is enough."

"Heh heh. Really? I'm glad to hear I'm such a source of confidence."

"Yes, if you two are with me, our teacher is sure to know who was the victim and who was the perpetrator when I explain why we're late."

Kimi began a full-speed dash toward the academy. *Ah*, thought Asama as she saw the idiot sister add a spin to her run to look back.

"Heh heh heh! You two can be late! I intend to make it in time even if it kills me!"

"Ah, hey, wait!"

“Oh, dear. Why would I wait? Silly girls, you come running after me with your giant boobs jiggl-...no, I suppose that’s asking too much of Mitotsudaira... Well, you get the idea!”

“No, I really don’t!”

At any rate, they started running. The athlete in the lead was taking this seriously and Asama wanted to use an acceleration spell to keep up, but they had a mock battle for gym class that day. She did not want to use up any Blessings.

Of course, she also felt wearing themselves out physically would affect the mock battle too, but...

“Hey, Kimi, wait!”

She pursued Kimi who must have found this amusing because she hummed, skipped, and spun around all while maintaining her incredible speed.

“If someone saw this,” said Mitotsudaira, “it would look like a youthful scene of three girls teasing each other in a game of tag, wouldn’t it? You know, giggling and frolicking around.”

“Probably so,” said Asama. Her shoulders drooped as they left the nature district and arrived on the road leading to the academy.

They started seeing some students who were aiming to arrive just as the first bell rang, and on top of the stairs...

“...Ah.”

Everyone was waiting. Yes, they would be using the city for the mock battle, so everyone was gathered on the bridge.

So Asama hurried as the first bell rang through the sky. With Kimi out ahead and Mitotsudaira by her side, she rushed to join him and the others standing side by side as Oriotorai began taking roll.

“Sorry I’m late! Asama Tomo: present!”

Title Page

いつものことを
どうすれば違って見えるのか
今における一つの答えの始まり始まり



きみとあさまで

第八章『隠し場所の達人』……………P5
第九章『舞台前の誤魔化し人』……………P43
第十章『肌合わせ場所の無防備娘』…P97
第十一章『反響上の狼』……………P147
第十二章『先行場の駆け引き娘』……………P169
第十三章『連結部屋の望み手』……………P211
第十四章『閉め場所の飾り手達』……………P267

第十五章『舞台への飛び込み者』……………P291
第十六章『独壇場の作り物』……………P331
第十七章『舞台の破壊者』……………P367
第十八章『いつもの園の賛同者』……………P387
第十九章『約束現場の奢り者』……………P433
最終章『武蔵の歌姫達』……………P467

IV 下

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)
デザイン: 渡邊宏一 (2725 Inc.)

What makes the usual

Appear to be different?

This is the beginning to one possible answer

Kimitoasamade

Chapter 8: Expert in a Hidden Place – P5

Chapter 9: Deceiver Before the Stage – P43

Chapter 10: Defenseless Girl in a Place of Skin Contact – P97

Chapter 11: Wolf in the Reverberation – P147

Chapter 12: Bargaining Girl in the Lead – P169

Chapter 13: Hoper in Connected Rooms – P211

Chapter 14: Decorators in a Closed Place – P267

Chapter 15: Unannounced Stage Performer – P291

Chapter 16: Creation of an Unrivalled Field – P331

Chapter 17: Destroyer of the Stage – P367

Chapter 18: Endorser of the Usual Garden – P387

Chapter 19: Gifter at a Promised Place – P433

Final Chapter: Musashi's Songstresses – P467

IV

B

Kawakami Minoru

Illustrations: Satoyasu (TENKY)

Design: Watanabe Kouichi (2725 Inc)

Characters

character

● 武蔵



あさ ま とも
浅間・智

武蔵アリアダスト教導院二年。浅間神社の一人娘で中位巫女。弓の射撃を得手とする。地脈の整調も得手とする。クラス内オパイクース最上位。全裸と馬鹿姉の幼馴染み。



あおい き み
葵・喜美

武蔵アリアダスト教導院二年。浅間の幼馴染みで愚弟の姉。大椿系の奏者で、ダンスとエロ関係の術式が充実。どちらかというと賢姉。



ネイト・ミツダイラ

武蔵アリアダスト教導院二年。水戸松平の暫定襲名者であり半人狼で六護式仏蘭西出身で武蔵内騎士連盟第一等でオパイクース低めで“ですの”語尾でチョーカー好きの肉好きで大体被害者。馬鹿の事を王としている。



アデーレ・バルフェット

武蔵アリアダスト教導院二年。眼鏡。クラス内オパイクース最下位。最下位。六護式仏蘭西系の従士。脚力があり、突撃性に優れるが貧乏ババ人生。犬好き。



むかい すず
向井・鈴

武蔵アリアダスト教導院二年。盲目の少女。クラス内における外道行為のストッパー。たまにアクセル。



マルガ・ナルゼ

武蔵アリアダスト教導院二年。黒くて白くて無い方。匪堕天六枚翼。同人作家。結構辛辣。ナイトとは恋人関係。



マルゴット・ナイト

武蔵アリアダスト教導院二年。金色で黒くてある方。墜天六枚翼。おおよよまああはははは。ナルゼとは恋人関係。



P-01s

一般民。というか自動人形。この春に三河から乗り込んできたらしい。記憶がなくて青雷亭に拾われて店員やってます。セメント。



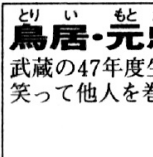
なお まさ
直政

武蔵アリアダスト教導院二年。機関部で班長したり片腕義腕の姉御。



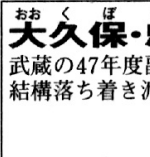
ほん だ まさ ずみ
本多・正純

三河から転入してきた男装少女。もう一回言う。男装少女。断層少女とか言わない。ギャグがよく冷える。



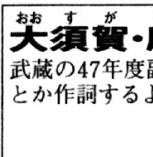
とり い もと ただ
鳥居・元忠

武蔵の47年度生徒会長兼総長。大椿系の上位巫女。よく笑って他人を巻き込んだり突き落とす。



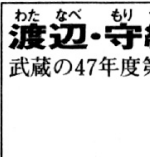
大久保・忠世

武蔵の47年度副会長。武蔵の騎士第五位にいる女騎士。結構落ち着き派。



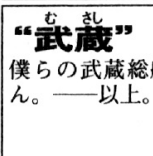
おお す が やす たか
大須賀・康高

武蔵の47年度副長。体格のいいのんびり系。ラブソングとか作詞するよ！



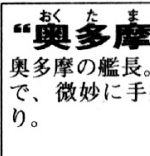
わた なべ もり つな
渡辺・守綱

武蔵の47年度第一特務。金髪女子。槍使い。苦勞性。



む し
“武蔵”

僕らの武蔵総艦長自動人形。辛辣モードがたまりません。——以上。



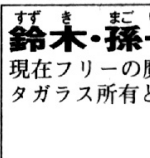
おく た ま
“奥多摩”

奥多摩の艦長。仕事を“武蔵”がやっちゃう事が多いので、微妙に手持ち無沙汰。たまにボディを使い分けた。



あおい
葵・トリー

この頃から既に全裸。



すず き まご いち
鈴木・孫一

現在フリーの魔神族少女でガンナーで眼帯で神格武装やタガラス所有という属性多すぎキャラ。

一般生徒の方々

今回頑張る超頑張る。

● Musashi

- Asama Tomo: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. The only daughter of the Asama Shrine and a mid-level shrine maiden. Specializes in archery and in tuning ley lines. Stands at the top of the class's boob caste system. Childhood friends with the nudist and his stupid sister.
- Aoi Kimi: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Asama's childhood friend and her foolish brother's older sister. An Ootsubaki-style musician with plenty of dancing and sexuality spells. More considerate than anything.
- Nate Mitotsudaira: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Provisional inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name, a half-werewolf, from Hexagone Française, rank 1 member of Musashi's knight's league, low on the boob caste system, speaks in a somewhat noble fashion, likes chokers, likes meat, and generally the victim. Calls the idiot her king.
- Adele Balfette: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Glasses. Lowest on the class's boob caste system. Yes, lowest. An Hexagone Française style of vassal. Has leg strength and can perform an excellent assault, but lives a poor part-timer's life. Loves dogs.
- Mukai Suzu: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Blind girl. Stopper for the horrible actions of the class. Sometimes accelerates them instead.
- Malga Naruze: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Black and white and has nothing. Six-winged fallen angel. Doujin author. Fairly bitter. In a relationship with Naito.
- Margot Naito: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Gold and black and has plenty. Six-winged descended angel. Oh, dear. Oh, my. Ah ha ha ha ha ha. In a relationship with Naruze.
- P-01s: A normal citizen. Or rather, an automaton. Apparently boarded the Musashi at Mikawa this spring. Has no memories, was taken in by the Blue Thunder, and works there. Cement-like.
- Naomasa: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Barely appears so there might be no point in putting her here. Works as a team leader in the engine division and has one false arm.
- Honda Masazumi: Crossdressing girl who transferred in from Mikawa. Let

me say that again: crossdressing girl. No, that doesn't mean she wears a cross. Her gags get icy reactions.

- Torii Mototada: Musashi's '47 Student Council President and Chancellor. An upper level Ootsubaki-style shrine maiden. Laughs a lot, gets other people caught in the middle, and pushes them off.
- Ookubo Tadayo: Musashi's '47 Vice President. A female knight ranked fifth among Musashi's knights. A fairly composed person.
- Oosuga Yasutaka: Musashi's '47 Vice Chancellor. A well-built carefree person. Writes love songs!
- Watanabe Moritsuna: Musashi's '47 1st Special Duty Officer. Blonde girl. Uses a spear. A worrier.
- "Musashi": Our overall captain automaton. Her sharp-tongued mode is the best. Over.
- "Okutama": Caption of Okutama. "Musashi" tends to do a lot of the work, so she often ends up emptyhanded. Sometimes uses different bodies for different uses.
- Aoi Toori: Already a nudist at this point.
- Suzuki Magoichi: A character with way too many attributes: freelance demon girl, gunner, eyepatch, and owner of the divine weapon Yatagarasu.
- Normal Students: This time they're going to work hard. Super hard.

Glossary

・**襲名**:歴史再現のために適格者が歴史上の人物を襲名すること。

・**術式**:流体を加工することで空間中に奇跡を起こすこと。

・**白砂台座**:出雲産業座の神社系ブランド。

・**神格武装**:通常の武装とは違い、特有の能力を持つ武装。

・**神州**:極東のかつての呼び方。

・**神道**:極東の教譜。極東の神々を信奏し、神奏術を用いる。

・**聖術**:Tsirhc系の術式。旧派は聖譜や聖者関係、改派は聖譜のみから力を導く。

・**生徒会**:各教導院の内務、外務などを行う組織。

・**聖譜**:前地球時代の歴史を記した歴史書。七組+抄本がある。

・**聖譜記述**:聖譜の機能により、前地球時代の歴史が百年先まで自動更新される。が、一六四八年の記述を最後に更新が停止している。

・**聖連**:聖譜連盟。歴史再現を主導するための組織。

・**奏者**:各教譜の信徒。

・**総長連合**:総長を長に、各教導院の警備など、実働と指揮を行う組織。

・**卒業**:極東以外の国は無期限制。極東は十八歳卒業制。

た行

・**代演**:術式発動に拝気を使用する代わりに、神の喜ぶものを奉納すること。

・**地脈**:空間を構成する流体の流れる経路の内、太いもの。

・**Tsirhc**:神の子を長に据えた教譜。聖譜を信奏する。

・**Tes.**【テス/テストメント】:“応答”“了解”の意。

・**三征西班牙**【トレスエスパンア】:大内、大友家+スペインのこと。ポルトガルも併合中。

あ行

・**出雲産業座**(IZUMO):極東最大規模の企業座。極東の神社の総本山で武蔵の建造を担った企業。

・**六護式仏蘭西**【エグザゴンフランセーズ】:毛利家+フランスのこと。

・**ATELL**:流体の最小単位。術式に使用する。

・**英国**:イングランド。浮遊島を用いており、極東の土地や大名を支配していない。

・**M.H.R.R.**:羽柴家+神聖ローマ帝国のこと。

か行

・**外燃拝気**:自分の外に蓄積された拝気のこと。流体燃料などが該当。

・**旧派**【カトリック】:古くから存在するTsirhcの主流。

・**教導院**:学校施設のこと。実質上の政軍中心部。分校が多く存在する。

・**教譜**:神や聖譜を信奏する組織。集団。

・**極東**:重奏統合騒乱の後、神州をこう呼ぶ。

・**K.P.A.Italia**【ケーピーエイタリア】:安芸諸国連合+イタリア都市連合のこと。

・**賢鉱石、賢水**:流体を含んだ鉱石、水。流体燃料としても使用可能。

・**校則法**:聖連が取り決めた教導院間の基本法。

さ行

・**Jud.**【ジャッジ/ジャッジメント】:咎人用の“応答”“了解”の意。

・**重奏世界**:かつて神州のコピーを置いた異空間のこと。地脈制御で保たれていた。

・**重奏統合争乱**:重奏世界が崩壊した際に生じた重奏世界側住人と現実世界側(神州)住人の戦争。重奏世界側が勝利して神州は暫定支配を受ける。

・**重奏領域**:落ちてきた重奏世界の神州が、碎けながら現実側に合一した箇所。

・**武蔵**:航空都市艦。極東に許された唯一の独立領土。



・**武蔵アリアダスト学院**:武蔵上、奥多摩に存在する極東の代表校。

・**矛盾許容**:この世界の基礎能。あらゆる物理法則の同時存在を叶える。

・**ムラサイ**:Tsirhcとは別に聖譜を信奏する後発派。

ら行

・**流体**:矛盾許容型の空間構成要素。

・**流体燃料**:燃料として精製された流体。外燃拌気や、流体駆動器に用いられる。

・**流体駆動器**:流体の空間変異力を用いた駆動器。効果は内部の紋章などによって変化する。

・**流体炉**:空間から流体を抽出精製する炉。地脈炉より出力は低いが比較的安全。

・**歴史再現**:聖譜記述を人々が再現して世界の流れを保つこと。

な行

・**内燃拌気**:自分の中にため込んだ拌気のこと。

は行

・**拌気**:人間が一時間存在するために必要な流体。3600ATELL。術式の消費ATELL換算単位。

・**P.A.ODA【ピーエーオダ】**:織田家+オスマン。

・**表示枠**:各教譜の基本加護を使用するための術式デバイス。

・**改派【プロテスタント】**:旧派腐敗からの脱却と時代に合わせたTsirhcの新流。

・**武神**:人が同化して動く巨大な人型機械。

・**奉納**:神に、神の喜ぶものや内燃拌気を納めること。献納。

ま行

・**走狗【マウス】**:神道教譜と奏者の仲介をする霊獣型デバイス。他教譜では走徒とも言う。

・**魔術**:欧州で絶賛迫害中の民間術式。

・**末世**:この世の終わり。聖譜の歴史記述が途切れる一六四八年のこと。

・**帝**:神格者、京にて神器による地脈制御を行っていると言われる。俗世に関与しない。

・**三河**:元信公の地脈炉暴走崩壊で消滅。

●この頃の浅間の予定●



「姉ちゃん! 姉ちゃん! 雅楽祭で何やんの!?!」



「フッフ、そうねえ。私達の番で怪異祓いをやるけど、その後のアンケートでアンコール権を得たバンドが単独アンコール。それを狙いもしてるのよ?」

A

- Academy: An educational facility. Used as the center of political and military power. Tend to have many branch schools.
- Academy Rules: The basic laws upheld between academies. Agreed to by the Testament Union.
- Apocalypse: The end of the world. 1648 when the Testament's history descriptions end.
- ATELL: The smallest unit of ether. Used for spells.

B

- Blessings: The amount of ether needed for a human to exist for one hour. 3600 ATELL. Conversion unit for a spell's ATELL consumption.

C

- Catholic: The old mainstream version of Tsrhc.
- Chancellor's Officers: An organization led by the chancellor which leads the academy and performs work such as defense.
- Contradiction Allowance: The foundational ability of the world. Allows the simultaneous existence of all sorts of physical laws.

D

- Divine States: Former name of the Far East.
- Divine Weapon: A weapon that, unlike a normal weapon, has a unique ability.

E

- Emperor: A divine individual who is said to control the ley lines using the Imperial Regalia in Kyou. Does not interfere with the world.
- England: Uses a floating island and does not control any Far Eastern land or Far Eastern daimyo.
- Ether: Component that makes up contradiction-allowing space.
- Ether Engine: An engine that uses ether's space-altering ability. The effect changes based on the internal crest.
- Ether Fuel: Ether that has been purified into fuel. Used as External Blessings or for ether engines.
- Ether Reactor: A reactor that extracts and purifies ether from the air. Has a lower output than a ley line reactor, but is relatively safe.
- External Blessings: Blessings accumulated outside of oneself. Ether fuel is an example.

F

- Far East: Name of the Divine States after the Harmonic Unification War.

G

- God of War: A giant humanoid machine that people combine with to move.
- Graduation: No limit for nations other than the Far East. Far Easterners must graduate at 18.

H

- Harmonic Territory: Locations where the fallen Harmonic World Divine States unified with the real world while breaking apart.
- Harmonic Unification War: A war between the harmonic world residents and the real world (Divine States) residents after the destruction of the harmonic world. The harmonic world residents won and began a provisional rule over the Divine States.
- Harmonic World: A former alternate space that copied the Divine States. Preserved through ley line control.
- Hexagone Française: Mouri clan + France.
- History Recreation: Recreating the Testament descriptions to maintain the path the world takes.
- Holy Spells: Tsirhc spells. The Catholics are related to the Testament and holy individuals while the Protestants derive power only from the Testament.

I

- Inherited Name: The name of a historical figure given to an appropriate individual for the history recreation.
- Internal Blessings: blessings stored within oneself.
- IZUMO: The Far East's largest corporation. The headquarters for Far Eastern shrines and the corporation that built the Musashi.

J

- Judge/Judgment: Means “understood”. Used by criminals.

K

- K.P.A. Italia: Association of Aki States + Union of Italian City States.

L

- Ley Line: The thicker of the pathways through which ether flows.

M

- Magic: Folk spells currently under persecution in Europe.
- M.H.R.R.: Hashiba clan + Holy Roman Empires.
- Mikawa: Destroyed by the collapse of Lord Motonobu's ley line reactor.
- Mlasi: A later non-Tsirhc religion that also worships the Testament.
- Mouse: A spirit beast device to act as an intermediary between the Shinto religion and its musicians. Other religions use different names.
- Musashi: Aerial city ship. The sole independent territory allowed for the Far East.

[First Starboard Ship – Shinagawa/Second Starboard Ship – Tama/Third Starboard Ship – Takao/First Central Ship – Musashino/Back Central Ship – Okutama/First Port Ship – Asakusa/Second Port Ship – Murayama/Third Port Ship – Oume]

- Musashi Ariadust Academy: The Far East's representative academy which exists on Okutama of Musashi.
- Musician: A religion's worshiper.

O

- Offering: Providing a god with something they will enjoy or Internal Blessings.
- Orei Metallo/Nero: Ore or water containing ether. Can be used as ether fuel.

P

- P.A. Oda: Oda clan + Ottomans.
- Protestant: A new style of Tsirhc created to escape the corruption of Catholicism and to adjust to the new age.

R

- Religion: Organizations or groups that worship a god or the Testament.

S

- Shinto: Far Eastern religion. Worships the Far Eastern gods and uses divine music spells.
- Shirasago Enterprises: IZUMO's shrine brand.
- Sign Frame: Spell device needed to use each religion's basic protection.
- Spell: Causing a miracle in a certain space by processing ether.
- Student Council: The organization that handles an academy's domestic and foreign affairs.
- Substitution: Offering something to please a god instead of using Blessings to activate a spell.

T

- Tes/Testament: Means “understood”.
- Testament: A history book that provides the history of the earth’s previous age. There are seven pairs and excerpts.
- Testament Descriptions: History of the earth’s previous age that is automatically updated by the Testament. However, it stopped updating after the description for 1648.
- Testament Union: An organization meant to lead the history recreation.
- Tres España: Oouchi and Ootomo clans + Spain. Currently includes Portugal.
- Tsirhc: A religion which places the Son of God at the top. Worships the Testament.

Asama's Plans

Toori: Sis! Sis! What are you gonna do at the Gagaku Festival!?

Kimi: Heh heh heh. Well, we will be exorcising a mysterious phenomenon during our turn, but whichever band gets the most votes gets to do an encore at the end. We're also going for that.

Chapter 8: Expert in a Hidden Place

第八章

『隠し場所の達人』



思った以上に
思っていないつもりで
思った以上に
思いを秘めて
配点（熟成）

I meant to have fewer thoughts

Than I thought

But I hid more thoughts

Than I thought

Point Allocation (Maturing)

A festival began in the two large aerial cities of Musashi and Aki.

It was their combined Spring School Festival.

Since they could not use Aki's theatre ship, they had abandoned the idea of holding the opening ceremony at the midpoint between the two cities.

Instead, the ceremony was held at both sites with a simultaneous divine transmission and commentary.

On the Aki side, the Pope-Chancellor gave a speech at Itsukushima Shrine: "Starting this year, K.P.A. Italia will work to increase its national strength and to renew its role as ruler of the Mediterranean and representative of Catholicism! That is one more reason to give this year's festival our all so that our glory might never end."

According to Neshinbara:

"The Pope-Chancellor probably intends to visit the other nations for direct negotiations. Some will scoff at the idea of the pope visiting to bow down to others, but he used to be a powerful merchant. To nations with little obvious negotiating power, his presence will be nothing but a threat."

Meanwhile on the Far Eastern side, Torii had gathered everyone in the schoolyard for her opening greeting.

"Everyone. I brought one of those fireworks that were going off overhead. It's already been lit, though."

Everyone panicked. And then a nudist spoke from the academy gate.

"The one I brought is even bigger. It's also already lit, though."

He cut off the fleeing people's escape route, so their mission was now to eliminate him.

"Honestly, why do they keep doing these things?"

Asama sighed and made sure she could activate an emergency barrier at any time. Kimi tapped her on the back and Mitotsudaira watched the two criminals being carried to the guard station.

"So another year's spring festival has begun..."

As a reward for the successful mission, two fireworks went off in the sky. That signaled the festival's beginning.

Tenzou was in his classroom: Class 2-Plum.

But he was not just waiting there or taking supplementary lessons.

He was helping with his class's part of the festival.

"In a way, doing a Blue-Thunder-sponsored cosplay teahouse is a pretty safe option."

"But we can't run it properly without getting Aoi-kun released from the guard station." Neshinbara crossed his arms while viewing his costume spread out on a desk. "Mukai-kun's sewing skills are incredible... This is a custom version of the uniform used in the popular cooking show Cooking With Fine China."

"Oh, that one that could be making French food or Alaskan food but always makes it Chinese-style?"

"The trick is that's always Chinese 'style' and not the real thing. Last time they said, 'Okay! Today we're going to turn a baumkuchen into Mapo Doufu! Don't worry! It'll probably taste good on rice!' and then it mysteriously turned into a show all about rice."

"I can imagine."

Then Tenzou looked to his own costume.

"But with that nudist involved in this, I was expecting us to be crossdressing."

“Yeah, there was a crossdressing set in the clothes basket earlier. There were a few others, but I didn’t ask if they were for the girls or us because I was afraid of getting involved.”

“That was a wise decision.”

“Judge. But, Crossunite-kun, do you have some ninja techniques to help out if *it comes to that*? Oh, but not for me to use. As material for my novels.”

“I actually do...”

Tenzou searched through his uniform’s pocket.

...This is it...no, wait, is it this? No, maybe this...

“You can’t find it?”

“Oh, sorry. I never use this after all. ...Oh, there it is. This is it!”

He pulled out a charm painted a flesh color.

He read off the instructions on the back.

“Let’s see... Um, ‘After spreading your legs in a pose of resignation, attach this from below your navel and down around to your butt. Removing it is a pain.’ That’s what it says.”

“Isn’t that just tape painted a flesh color? Isn’t there anything more dramatic? Like a ninja technique that turns you into a Technohexen girl?”

“I’m supposed to end up like Naruze-dono and Naito-dono?”

Without warning, something flew in through the window, grazed the back of his neck, and hit the hallway-side wall.

The wall shook and a round mark was left by the 10-yen coin bullet.

“Oh, sorry, Tenzou. I borrowed Margot’s and was test-firing it, but my hand slipped. ...And after I aimed so perfectly too.”

“Wait! That’s not what your hand slipping is supposed to mean!”

At any rate, they were apparently being bugged. Inquiring further would probably get him sniped, so he returned to the previous topic.

“If you want that kind of spell, I imagine Toori-dono would be your best bet.”

“But wouldn’t that make it feel less real?” asked the other Technohexen. “He does it so well you almost can’t call it crossdressing.”

“Maybe so, Naito-dono, but the rest of us are amateurs, so it’s going to seem a lot rougher.”

“Is that how it works?” asked Neshinbara. “Well, we should probably get changed, Crossunite-kun.”

“Yes. I’ll get that over with real quick.”

Tenzou changed his clothes.

Neshinbara frowned.

“That was fast.”

“I used a ninja technique.”

Then the starboard door opened.

“Nh!?”

Tenzou and everyone else tensed up when they saw Naruze standing there.

She looked around the classroom and her eyes stopped on Tenzou. She held a Magie Figur, but...

“Ah! Why are you already done changing!? And you’re not crossdressing! You leave me no choice...”

She continued staring at him while redrawing everything below his head as a busty crossdresser. Once she was done, she closed the door.

After a bit, he received a divine mail with that sketch attached.

“Here’s the rough. I think I’ll send it to the porn game team.”

“What are you planning!?”

“That’s up to them. Don’t worry, though. They’ll probably go with a genderbending game.”

“That’s plenty to worry about!”

But he knew no one was going to listen.

When he thought about it, he realized a busty body with a ninja face was something of a new genre.

...That could provide some work for the illustrators who have trouble with faces.

He thought he might be on the verge of a major business opportunity.

“Then again, ninjas can’t show their faces.”

“Crossunite-kun, what do you do on infiltration missions?”

“Judge. There are two types of ninjas: disguise types and stealth types. I am the latter. Well, if I had to, I might show my face for a disguise, but only somewhere where my identity isn’t known.”

“But,” said Ohiroshiki who was fixing his costume’s collar in front of a mirror. He looked to Tenzou using the edge of the mirror. “Tenzou-kun, what does it feel like to be busty, even if it’s just in an image?”

“Hm.” Tenzou placed a hand on his chin while viewing Naruze’s rough illustration. Then he grabbed his imaginary breasts. “If I actually had those as a part of my body, I imagine they would be heavy. ...If I ever get a busty blonde bride, I would make sure to help her support them, but I doubt I’ll ever come across someone with this fantastic a size and shape. Dreams are always so distant and out of reach, aren’t they? What I mean is...”

The sea was visible in the sky.

That was the scene from a beach on a giant floating island.

Two people were on that white sand: a green-hooded figure and a crow.

“Achoo!”

“Scarred!? Are you getting a chill!?”

“No, Milton. ...Didn’t I tell you before? There is a jinx that makes you sneeze when someone is talking about you.”

The hooded figure moved her hand near the chest within the hood.

The crow tilted his head to the right in midair and drifted a bit rightward.

“Scarred? What is it?”

“Judge. When I sneeze, my chest feels so tight. It may be inappropriate, but with the cloak hiding me, I should be fine loosening it some.”

There was a small, troubled smile below the hood.

“Because someone might talk about me again.”

“Anyway, that is my answer, Ohiroshiki-dono.”

“Oh, sorry. I’m playing a game with Persona-kun right now.”

“Wh-what is with your attitude!?”

Tenzou looked over and saw that Ohiroshiki had indeed finished adjusting his costume and was sitting across a desk from Persona-kun to compete against him in a sign frame rhythm game.

He had no intention of looking Tenzou’s way.

But Neshinbara did respond while completing the inspection of his costume.

“Crossunite-kun, you changed the topic from busty crossdressers to busty blondes and then spent 7 minutes talking nonstop. Are you okay in the head?”

Did I really talk for that long? thought Tenzou, feeling afraid for himself.

But at the same time...

“That would be because I have not talked about them for a while.”

“I see.”

Neshinbara removed his uniform’s jacket, undid the inner suit that acted as a shirt, removed that, and reached for his costume.

“The inside is made so you can swap out the lining. This is really well made.”

“We do have to wear them for a few days straight.”

“Is anyone not wearing one?”

“Mukai-dono didn’t know how to make one for Uqui-dono, so she made him more of a cloak.”

“She prepared well for this.”

Neshinbara put on the top of the costume’s inner suit. He wore it like a sleeveless vest and then closed the front.

“So it’s the same as a standard one. You can remove the air to make it skin tight.”

Then the starboard door opened.

“Oh?”

Tenzou and everyone else tensed up when they saw Naruze standing there.

She looked around the classroom and her eyes stopped on Neshinbara. She held a Magie Figur on which she sketched Neshinbara while he changed and then she closed the door.

After a moment, a sign frame appeared.

“This should be enough to sell on Oku Auc. Can I redden your cheeks?”

“W-wait, Naruze-kun!”

“Eh!? If I wait, I can sell it!? How many seconds!?”

Does this Technohexen think the world revolves around her?

...Is she still excited after reaching Rank 1?

But Neshinbara spoke into the divine transmission.

“Naruze-kun, are you sure you want me leaking the doujinshi you drew back in elementary school?”

“What was that? ...I just leaked the first 3 pages of Masako-san: Youkai Prison, that Youkai novel you wrote back in middle school. Let’s see: ‘One day, Masako thought, I must use my dark power to unite the samurai families———!’ What is that ‘———!’? Is it supposed to be funny?”

“Waaaah! I’m sorry, I’m sorry!”

“You sure lost in a hurry, Neshinbara-dono!”

That was too formidable of an opponent.

Then a sign frame opened in front of Tenzou.

“Um, it’s Asama. ...Tenzou-kun, are you normal?”

“A-Asama-dono, you’re pretty bad yourself!”

“Well, it’s just that Naruze drew a pretty realistic image just now, so I thought it might mean you had entered the same zone as Toori-kun. If so, I can help you use it to earn Blessings, so don’t let it end as a simple hobby.”

Tenzou had figured out the rules: If he responded, he lost.

And Asama had more to say:

“The guards showed up about getting Toori-kun released, so I’m going through that process. He should be able to manage the teahouse in half an hour, so free the classroom up for the girls, okay?”

“Judge.”

Just as he said that, the starboard door opened.

“Open sesame! Oh!? You sure are slow! Do you want to see me changing that badly!? Then take a look at this! I brought some charms that grow a dick, so I’ll be pasting these all over the place! Don’t worry! They’re based on the data I took from my foolish brother’s God Mosaic and they have gravitational control built in! Now, who wants to have one pasted backwards on their ass for some fun!? Or should I put them on the chairs so a moment of inattention gives you a surprise kanchou!? ...Oh, Ohiroshiki!? You look like you want that!”

“Asama-dono, chaos has just descended upon the classroom.”

“Yeah, she was carrying a bundle of Ootsubaki original spell charms, so be careful.”

She clearly thinks this is not her problem, thought Tenzou as Kimi began chasing Ohiroshiki and the others and strange screams filled the classroom.

Mitotsudaira came to a stop partway up the stairs to the third floor where Class Plum was located.

Her Loup-Garou hearing had picked up on a familiar voice and some screaming.

...Danger lies ahead.

She had gone to greet the Knight's League before coming here, but she still seemed to be a little early.

Everyone was preparing for the festival, so there were plenty of voices and noises coming from each classroom and students were walking around carrying supplies or wearing costumes. Some were decorating the stairs and hallways with colored paper chains and rings made from weaving branches and flowers together.

...We really are in school festival mode.

But Kimi's voice could be heard over all of it.

"Oh, Neshinbara! What's that costume? Suzu made it for you, didn't she? It looks great! So let's make it a crossdressing costume! Not to worry! I'll do your makeup. Yes, it will make for excellent doujinshi material and draw in the customers! ...Huh? Where will your dick go? Don't be silly. One of my spells can warp it to a general-use shared space. The other crossdressers will also have their dicks shoved into that space, so there might be some near misses, but you'll be fine. It's midday on a school day, after all."

Mitotsudaira knew one thing for sure: there was no escape for the boys.

It was awkward how the people walking through the hallways and putting together signs were focused on Class Plum.

Some of the students knew she was from Class Plum, so they kept their distance from her.

"..."

...Ah, those awkward stares...!

The Cerberus nearly barked on her head, so she stopped it with a hand and made a quick retreat to avoid a nervous sweat. She did not know what would arrive from the top of the stairs, so she walked backwards while descending them. And then...

"Mitotsudaira~!"

How did she know I was approaching?

“Don’t you want my foolish brother’s dick!?”

...Wh-what does she mean by that!?

Is she giving me usage rights?

Or is it removable?

Does he have a portable di-...that was close. I just about thought a very dangerous term. But if that kind of system did exist, guys wouldn’t get so worked up over size. Yes, and if a similar swappable system worked for girls, the entire size-based mental caste system wouldn’t exist. Yes. Wh-why am I on the verge of tears?

They said crazy people loved a festival and Kimi did indeed love the school festival. The idea of crazy people having inhuman strength seemed to fit here, but her voice passed right on by without stopping.

“Oh, fine then! I’ll just stick it in Asama’s desk! Ah, Tenzou! You crossdress too! Why do your hat’s eyes look so displeased!? Are you going to miss out on a chance to become busty!?”

Now’s my chance, thought Mitotsudaira as she completed her retreat.

Once down in the 2nd floor hallway, she thought about what to do. While the boys were changing, Asama was taking care of things at the guard station and the others were carrying over ingredients and other supplies.

...Then would they be at the front building’s first-floor entrance?

She opened a sign frame while turning toward the passageway to the front school building.

“Hm? It’s Koumon-chan.”

“Huh?”

Hearing a voice, she looked forward and saw Chancellor and Student Council President Torii with Tadayo.

Since they held a higher office than her, Mitotsudaira bowed. Tadayo responded by smacking Torii on the back of her head.

“What did you do?”

“Huh!? I-I didn’t do anything! She’s being virtuous! The Chancellor is an important position!”

“That’s not being virtuous, you idiot. She’s just being polite. ...And she’s provisionally 1st in line to ruling the Far East and a Knight’s League Rank 1, so she’s more important than you.”

“Then.” Torii looked to Tadayo. “Why aren’t you bowing to her?”

“I’m Vice President, so I’m more important.”

“You’re so unvirtuous, Tadayo.”

Tadayo smacked the back of Torii’s head again.

Mitotsudaira did not even question it because it was so normal for them.

And Tadayo looked her way.

“Rank 1. ...Oh, and this isn’t Chancellor’s Officers business. I’m just reporting something about the school event.” She opened a sign frame. “ ‘Musashi’ just released a bunch of information about the Gagaku Festival. We have the order of performances, so you can check on that.”

She turned a sign frame so Mitotsudaira could see and lightly tapped the back.

It zoomed in on a list of around a dozen band names.

Mitotsudaira scanned it from top to bottom.

...Oh, Margot and Naruze are near the end.

And Torii’s band was second to last.

“I had a feeling the Chancellor’s band would get a good spot...”

“Yeah, judge. But, Rank 1, look at the one below that.”

She did and saw the name “Kimitoasamade” written at the very bottom.

...Oh, that’s us. We’re here.

She was relieved to find they had been accepted and given a position in the lineup.

And then...

“Eh?”

She looked again, but that was definitely the very bottom.

She looked a third time and then asked a question with a smile.

“Does this list start from the bottom?”

“No, from the top.”

After receiving that calm rejection, Mitotsudaira felt a nervous sweat pouring from her body.

“U-umm...”

...That means we have the last performance, doesn't it?

She tried asking.

“Why?”

“If I had to guess why, it would be because Asama-chi's band is purifying the mysterious phenomena.”

Naito sat on the edge of Okutama's large windbreak barrier that looked like a ship's tower.

Naruze was checking the performance order on a Magie Figur next to Naito.

“Yeah, we got a decent position. We won't be forgotten but we won't be seen as too important either. That's just right. And none of the performances close to ours are anything like us.”

“Yeah. So the Chancellor's band gets what amounts to the main performance and Asama-chi's follows on after that to purify the mysterious phenomena.”

“Kimi will probably get really excited when she sees it, but I bet Mitotsudaira will feel shaken and Asama won't really know what it means.”

“Probably so,” agreed Naito as she looked behind them.

Several people were sitting on the wide wall back there.

They were from the delivery business.

...Everyone's gathered here.

They were discussing the rank change.

The previous changes had been handled via divine transmission, but that was not going to cut it this time.

This was a change of Rank 1.

The others lined up with their flight devices, flying ships, and brooms and Almirante crossed his arms in the center.

"Okay, um, how should I put this? This isn't really going to take effect until next year, but our Rank 1 has changed from Wild Kamelie to Zwei Fräulein."

The two Technohexen heard some cheers and sensed a few people turn their way.

But most of them were still looking at Wild Kamelie.

The woman said nothing.

And Almirante continued speaking.

"Wild Kamelie was made our representative for the year during the ceremony, so she'll keep that job until the next Walpurgis."

"Provisional representative."

Wild Kamelie made that quiet but definite correction.

"Judge." Almirante nodded. "Wild Kamelie has been our representative for a very long time. Um...about 200 years, I think?"

"5 years, you moron."

When Wild Kamelie smiled, Marine raised her eyebrows and slowly turned around.

"Who are you calling a moron, moron?"

"I don't want to hear that from someone who was beaten first."

"The order doesn't matter."

Marine refused to back down, but no one argued the point.

...They are the former Rank 1 and 2, after all.

Everyone was silent, but not because they were cautious.

If a fight broke out here, everyone could enjoy a fight between those two without having to worry about the rankings. But if they tried egging the women on, Almirante might stop it.

However, Wild Kamelie backed down first.

“I’m going to temporarily drop out of the rankings. Once I give up my rights as an Edel Brocken tester, I don’t know what will happen to my Hexen Frau, but I need to get a new start no matter what happens.”

“Then I-...”

Wild Kamelie cut off Marine.

“Since I’m dropping out, you remain the provisional Rank 2. Zwei Fräulein is the barrier blocking your way forward. Right?” she added to no one in particular. “Listen, everyone. You’ve worked as Technohexen and deliverers on the Musashi, so you should know a lot about the other nations. ...You know P.A. Oda is starting to act and the Thirty Years’ War is starting to intensify, right? Once that happens, it will mean a lot for Musashi that I lost to some students.” She spoke to Naito and Naruze behind her. “So continue on, Zwei Fräulein. ... Continue on to a place where you can demonstrate your strength and protect Musashi.”

Almirante spoke up as if to add to her words.

“Wild Kamelie. Are there even greater heights?”

“There are.”

Because...

“Whether you want to move forward or higher, you will always find somewhere to go. And that’s true for social status, for enemies, and for your own pride.”

"I see," Naruze heard Almirante say. "That's a good assignment for those students. Besides, Zwei Fräulein are still only provisionally Rank 1 until the start of next year. Those of you ranked below them need to keep aiming higher. ...I'll be watching you all work at it."

"No fair, Almirante!"

Everyone laughed and said that, but he responded.

"Wait." He held out a hand. "Don't be ridiculous. I'll join in once Marine loses."

"That's a lot of responsibility..." sighed Marine.

Naruze had a thought when she saw that.

...That's kind of oppressive.

You could call it solidarity or a familial atmosphere, but she felt like she needed to spend more time with them before she could join in like that.

Would she have that kind of time once she graduated as a student?

...I'm not sure.

While she thought about that, she saw Almirante look to everyone and speak.

"Zwei Fräulein are the provisional Rank 1, but I doubt anyone is going to challenge them anytime soon. So for now, there's something we need to prepare to make them our new face."

"Huh? Something to prepare? What's that, Almirante?"

It was Wild Kamelie and not Almirante who turned around to respond.

"The ad song for Musashi's delivery union."

"...Oh, that annual one."

"Right," said Wild Kamelie. "That. The tradition is to have it made by the provisional Rank 1 and whoever they beat."

"Eh? Wild Kamelie...you can write songs?"

Margot turned around when she heard that question.

"If it's 'whoever they beat', wouldn't it be all the others too?"

“That’s right. And...the provisional Rank 1 doesn’t get any say in the music or lyrics.”

“Well, if you did, it would be nothing but praising yourself...”

“Also,” said Wild Kamelie. “It’s the provisional Rank 1 that sings it. Since my win lasted so long, I had to start changing up the instrumental parts to make it sound fresh by the third year.”

Naruze had a bad feeling about where this was headed.

“Wait a second, all of you.”

“Yes?”

“...You aren’t going to make us sing some bawdy song, are you?”

“We’re not going to play something like that for our ads, idiot.”

“But,” said Wild Kamelie while narrowing her eyes. “Malga Naruze, listening to your songs, you never use the word ‘love’ in your lyrics, do you? Why might that be?”

...Kh!

She wanted to say that she could not use such an embarrassing word in front of people, but she forced down the complaint. Unfortunately, her silence was all the answer anyone needed. Margot had a look of “oh, dear” on her face.

Then Almirante opened a sign frame.

“Listen. While listening to the opening theme of Armored Warrior Monks: Bhikkhus, a historical show my grandkid watches, I wrote up some lyrics to use as a jumping off point. I wanted to add a chorus that repeated the phrase ‘Oh, Zwei Fräulein’ over and over, but I couldn’t fit it in.”

“Well, thank goodness for that!!”

Naruze replied on reflex and the others turned her way.

“So you wouldn’t like that!?”

“Then let’s do it!”

“Yeah, let’s do it! We’ve gotta do it...!”

“Let’s make these lyrics the kind of thing we’d be way too embarrassed to sing ourselves!”

...These people...

Margot tapped her on the shoulder.

“This is fine. It means they’re celebrating our win.”

Before Naruze could ask “are you sure?”, Margot continued.

“I think.”

Me too, thought Naruze from the bottom of her heart.

Asama was in their classroom.

It was past noon. Their school festival teahouse was already open for business and it was currently the shrine maiden time.

...Changing costumes depending on the time really is well thought out.

On the first day, the order of costumes was apparently original→shrine maiden→samurai→Technohexen→knight. There had been other ideas like executioner, grave keeper, or god of war, but those genres had been a little too far out there.

During the shrine maiden time, the girls waited tables and the boys worked in the kitchen.

With Ohiroshiki there, she had thought the menu would expand when the girls were waiting tables, but...

“I guess they can’t leave all the cooking to Ohiroshiki.”

She could hear the boys’ voices from beyond the partition.

“Okay, Noriki-kun, set the heat to low! ...No, not like that! When I say low heat, I mean just a whisper of a flame! Yes, in terms of little girls, think of it as a 3 year old! How about that? You understand it now, don’t you? ...Hassan-kun! That is supposed to be an apple pie! Don’t turn it into curry!”

Will they be okay?

But strangely, the customers were mostly girls. There were some upperclassmen there, but...

“I thought there would be a bunch of upperclassmen boys here when the girls were waiting tables.”

“Yes, people do have some preconceived notions about upperclassmen. A lot of girls see them as more mature.”

Asama had seen that on the divine network and in manga. But...

“Our class doesn’t have much of that, does it?”

They did not give much thought to school year.

After all, they were often out on official duties or working real jobs. In that case, it did not matter if someone was an upperclassman or not. You would scold them if they got in the way of work and you would give them instructions to “utilize” them.

Their class had a lot of people with a clear plan for their future. That was probably the reason.

She wanted to think it meant they all had professional attitudes, but...

...Is that really true?

Asama had had a certain thought on that matter recently. She wondered if there was a kind of synergy working between them all.

In her case, everyone knew so much more about music and working than she did and she found that incredible, so she tried to catch up to them.

It was not that she was afraid of losing. She simply wanted to be able to do it herself. That was likely because the idea of Shinto purification was at the foundation of her thoughts.

Everyone else probably had things like that as well.

...So if we all find each other incredible and try to catch up with each other...

She guessed they were in the process of doing that.

There were also some third years like that, but when they met Asama’s class in a place like this, they would approach using their on-the-job relationships.

So when Naomasa served a third year she knew from the engine division...

“Team leader! Shouldn’t you be keeping an eye on the engines!?”

“Don’t you have anything to say about how I’m dressed?” asked Naomasa.

“Yeah! It doesn’t have many pockets for storing stuff!”

So according to Mitotsudaira...

“This is less a teahouse and more of a place for our various connections to visit and counsel us.”

“But the two of us haven’t been waiting any tables.”

“Do you really think anyone is going to call over the Asama Shrine Representative or the provisional 1st in line?”

Asama thought of Kimi and him, but they were waiting tables at the moment.

“This and the Technohexen time are the only costumes that restrict it to just girls. But,” said Mitotsudaira as she looked to the entrance. “I think *that* is one of the reasons the upperclassmen boys are only watching from a distance.”

A shrine maiden was serving drinks to a table by the entrance.

Even with the tail ballast attached, the shrine maiden used practiced motions to not bump into anything.

“Toori-kun, you’ve gotten a lot better at crossdressing...”

“Tomo! You really shouldn’t encourage him!”

“But it’s true.”

Frighteningly enough, all of the 3rd year boys who had entered during the shrine maiden time had been fooled.

Shrine maiden cafes were fairly common on Musashi, but their class had a lot of famous people like Asama and the first ones to wait on the tables had been Kimi and him, who were used to this kind of thing as entertainers.

...That was really well done...

Since a lot of the people here knew the class, they had apparently thought the crossdresser was “a new face here to help out”. When they realized they had

been so thoroughly duped, they had become beings who only held a tilted teacup that they endlessly stirred with a spoon.

“Would anyone be willing to come if they knew that in advance?”

“Most of the girls don’t seem to mind. But if you’re talking about boys...um, there’s that boy from Naruze’s manga research club. He’s supposed to be sketching some material, but he’s so nervous he can’t keep his drawing hand moving.”

Asama made a mental note to check with the event sponsors to make sure nothing that used them as a model was released.

Then a cry came from the table of girls he had been waiting on.

He had removed his wig to reveal who he was.

It was amusing how the girl who had already visited said, “See, I told you!”

“It’s hardly a surprise when you see it every day in our class...”

“My, my,” said Kimi as she walked over. She must have been doing a love fortunetelling at another table because she had a love prayer charm in her cleavage. “Are you showing off how you know my foolish brother better than them?”

Asama thought about that.

Kimi’s accusation was accurate. It was true Asama knew him better than those other girls. Thanks to his contract, spells, and divine protections, she knew a lot about how he lived his life.

But at the same time...

“If anything, I was saying they’re lucky he isn’t being even worse than that.”

The way they lived their lives was just too different.

But Kimi bent her eyes in a smile and said more.

“But how do you feel about that kind of person?”

“Well...”

She had thought about this in the early morning the other day.

“I would call him a hopeless person.”

Mitotsudaira listened to Kimi’s reaction to Asama.

Kimi breathed a quiet sigh and tapped Asama’s shoulder. But...

“Quite a strange ‘lid’ you have there.”

“Eh?”

That expression of confusion came from both Asama and Mitotsudaira.

...Lid?

What did that mean? But while Asama tilted her head in confusion, Kimi moved away to wait on another table.

Mitotsudaira watched her leave and thought about what Asama and Kimi had said.

A hopeless person.

That was the obvious way to describe her king. Watch how he acted on a daily basis and anyone would say the same.

Then how did that act as a “lid”? Mitotsudaira thought about it.

“————”

And something occurred to her.

...Tomo knows my king better than your average person...

In that case...

...Ah.

Something was odd.

Something was contradictory and out of place.

If he was hopeless, then he was a nuisance and should just be left alone.

But she knew him well and he was certainly a nuisance, but she simply called him “hopeless”.

“Tomo.”

Mitotsudaira felt like she had realized something important.

It was something she would have trouble putting to words, but if she managed it, it would become a powerful truth.

But...

“Hm? What is it, Mito?”

When Asama responded so casually, Mitotsudaira became painfully aware of what Kimi had meant.

Asama did not notice anything off about what she had said.

So her “lid” was something that put a lid on everything, including the realization that something was out of place.

There should have been a great variety of feelings and thoughts there, but she put a lid on all of that by summing it up with the word “hopeless” in a way that only made sense to her.

She was probably the only person who thought “hopeless” worked as a description.

So if Mitotsudaira led her to realize the truth, she might open that “lid”.

But in doing so...

...I would be interfering with Tomo's feelings and thoughts.

That was why Kimi had left it alone.

Mitotsudaira did not know what Kimi thought would happen here. But...

“Y-yes...”

Mitotsudaira swore to herself she would not trample on and disturb her friend's feelings as if she knew what she was doing.

So...

“...That's right.”

She decided to think the same thing as Asama.

So she spoke to her friend with a smile.

“He really is a hopeless person.”

“He really is...”

Mitotsudaira smiled bitterly when Asama placed a hand on her cheek.

Asama’s eyes were on Kimi’s and his backs. And...

“Well, hopeless may be a good description for all of us.”

Mitotsudaira nodded at that and the Cerberus barked on her head.

The girls here as customers turned around and cried out as they looked at the Cerberus, but Mitotsudaira had no intention of going over to let them see or touch the creature.

After all, she was a part of Mitotsudaira. Also...

...She can finally leave.

Most likely, started Mitotsudaira. That will happen during the festival’s mysterious phenomenon purification.

The Cerberus had no way of knowing that, but she wanted to pamper the creature while she could. That thought made her smile bitterly in her heart.

She too liked making excuses.

She made sure to add that excuse of “because the Cerberus is going away”.

But that was not it.

That was not why she was pampering the Cerberus.

She wanted the creature to enjoy herself so she would feel satisfied whenever the time might come.

...Yes.

That sounds like something my king would say, thought Mitotsudaira.

Nine years had passed since that loss from his past. The remorse still gnawed at him, but she knew he would not let it stop him. She also hoped that would allow him to keep his promise with her, but...

“Nooo, no, no. How my boobs work is a secret. ...I couldn’t possibly give away an Asama Shrine secret technique like that!”

He seemed to be getting carried away while chatting with the customers. But as Mitotsudaira watched him...

...Oh, I’m also thinking they’re lucky he isn’t being worse.

She had also thought of him as hopeless.

...That’s a “lid”, isn’t it?

It was possible she would eventually be more aware of that, but for the moment, she watched Asama walk over to correct him and Kimi walk over to tease her. And...

“Honestly, what are all of you doing?”

Mitotsudaira joined in as well. Times like this were always so much fun.

And while she moved to join the others...

“...Ah.”

Suzu turned toward the window while sitting at the register counter.

And when the others looked that way too...

“Heh heh. The sky is opening up.”

The white stealth barrier opened from the bow end, like a wind blowing through. The motion and intensity were similar to a tent being stripped away in a single breath.

“That would be the official beginning.”

The daytime bell rang and the sky opened up to reveal the blue.

Mitotsudaira saw a shape there.

A single large aerial ship floated in the sky starboard of Musashi.

It was Theatre Ship Fushimi Castle.

“Shinagawa” stood in Shinagawa’s cargo plaza as she watched Theatre Ship

Fushimi Castle approach from starboard.

The Fushimi Castle had been made by modifying the Tanigawa Castle and it was 300 meters long. Its approach was smooth, but the top surface was normally used as a transport ship and it was towed like a floating warehouse.

So for its approach...

“This is no different from a transport ship. ...In fact, we have dealt with it as a transport ship quite often, so just do the same now. Over.”

According to the port management data on her sign frame, the laborers had already secured the ropes thrown down by the Fushimi Castle. Shinagawa would attach a towing belt to the ship, but another automaton was managing that.

She soon received the authorization sign frame indicating the connection was complete.

From there, the Fushimi Castle only had to move down lower than Shinagawa. The conduction pipes connected along with the towing belt would use the height difference to transport things like fuel and water to the ship.

There were also some other supplies to send over:

“Are those large storage devices? Over.”

A red and white Kraken-class transport ship with the Asama Shrine emblem on the side moved above the Fushimi Castle.

The Asama Shrine transport ship had a transport pallet attached to the bottom.

The box-shaped pallet was made to unload its contents from the front or the back and it contained three storage devices.

Those were used to absorb ley line stagnations.

They were nearly five times larger than the ones installed on the previous theatre ship. Eight of them would be placed below the theatre ship's deck to call in the mysterious phenomena surrounding the Musashi.

“The loading work will now begin. It will take eight hours to complete. Once

the inspection and tuning are complete, it will be time for mysterious phenomenon summoning and purification training. Over.”

She sent those words to every automaton on the ship. She had already checked the schedule thousands of times, but actually taking action was different somehow.

“I must apologize, ‘Shinagawa’,” said “Okutama”. “Sakai-sama has asked me to check the contents of a Black Disk box set, so I will not arrive in time for the inspection. Over.”

“A box set of what? Over.”

“Judge. It is a Taiga Noh Play of the Tale of Heike titled ‘The Bells of Onomatopoeia’^[1]. Everyone keeps yelling, ‘The sound of the bells!? The sound of the bells!? Gonnnnng! Gonnnnnnnnnng!’, and every single enemy’s name ends in ‘Mori’, so it is very hard to follow. Over.”

“I have determined that is a waste of your time. Skip watching it, look up a summary on the divine network, and use that for your report to Sakai-sama. Over.”

“I see. I didn’t think of that. Over.”

“Judge. Yes. Although recently, they will often put spoilers like ‘a masterpiece of the everyone-dies genre’ right below the title and then preface the actual summary with ‘the following contains spoilers’.”

Another sign frame appeared, so “Shinagawa” checked it.

It showed “Musashi” giving her an expressionless look.

Without a word, “Shinagawa” faced the first sign frame again.

“ ‘Okutama’. ...Make sure you actually watch it. Those were Sakai-sama’s instructions. Over.”

“Eh!? Why did you suddenly change your mind!? Over.”

Instead of answering the question, “Shinagawa” closed the sign frame from “Okutama”.

Then she faced the one from “Musashi”.

“Do you need something? Over.”

“Judge. The Fushimi Castle has settled on a list of participants for the Gagaku Festival. The list of participating bands is not new, but there are around 2000 in the standard participation block. Over.”

“I do not know what will happen with the mysterious phenomena, but there is a risk of a Hidden Dragon or such appearing again. And yet so many have chosen entertainment over danger. Humanity makes such baffling decisions. Over.”

“That is exactly why we must support them,” said “Musashi”. “Generally, the Chancellor’s Officers and the students trained in combat will move out front with the vassal unit. ...The rear guard will be formed from a Technohexen unit and a shrine maiden unit. Their training will be held on the Fushimi Castle this afternoon. Extracting mysterious phenomena with a god summoning is a ritualistic affair, so the defense unit’s role is to respond to any mysterious phenomena created as a side effect of the extraction. Over.”

Chapter 9: Deceiver Before the Stage

第九章

『舞台前の誤魔化し人』



何故
現実とは厳しいので御座るうか
配点（夢見過ぎ）

Why

Is reality so cruel?

Point Allocation (Too Much Dreaming)

Their strategy meeting began in the afternoon.

They were planning how to fully purify the Musashi.

At the end of the Gagaku Festival, the Gagaku would be used as an offering and the resultant purification would be used to tune the spherical ley line distortion surrounding the Musashi.

Eight storage devices would absorb the stagnation. Those devices were installed on the Fushimi Castle which was stopped 700 meters above the Musashi. That placed the Fushimi Castle at the center of the distortion, but it was also the Gagaku Festival stage. So according to “Musashi”...

“This will be the first time to hold the festival above the Musashi. That said, it is normally held off to starboard, so this is not that much different. Over.”

That left some problems. The “usual” ones like confirming the Musashi’s position when the stealth barrier was up and receiving an ether fuel supply, but also...

“It would be a major problem if the Fushimi Castle were to fall, so I recommend fixing it in place. Over.”

Based on that opinion from the ship captains, towing belts were extended from each ship to supply the Fushimi Castle with fuel and hold it in place.

The purification would be powered by the fuel from each ship, the songs from the Gagaku Festival, and the offering of the festival as a whole and it was predicted that several mysterious phenomena would appear on the deck, starting with the Hidden Dragon that had fled during the previous battle.

They could be purified with direct skill, but their “molds” could also be destroyed by containing the stagnation in the storage devices and tuning them. Thus, the front row of the “audience” onboard the Fushimi Castle was primarily made up of students with excellent combat skills.

The operation was named Emptying the Cup.

The spherical ley line stagnation was viewed as a cup and they were attempting to drink it dry.

...That said, we are making annoyingly little progress in this meeting.

Mitotsudaira wore a track suit and carried a small wooden container as she looked up into the sky.

She was on a transport ship approaching the Fushimi Castle outside the Musashi's stealth barrier.

The sea and the sky visible horizontally to the deck were blue. The mainland visible to north and Aki visible to west were bright with sunlight.

It was currently 2 PM. It was currently samurai cosplay time in their classroom and Kimi would be in charge of that, but here they were holding the meeting for Emptying the Cup.

"Holding a meeting while helping setup the stage is a little much."

She sighed and Asama gave her a bitter smile. The shrine maiden operated a sign frame as she replied.

"Sorry. You can blame the Testament Union for that. They said the Gagaku Festival is a school event but purifying mysterious phenomena is not, so we cannot set aside time for it during the Spring School Festival."

The meeting was being held via sign frame while they prepared for the Gagaku Festival.

If possible, they would have liked to hold the meeting during the normal preparation time at night, but with the Gagaku Festival approaching, a lot of people had work shifts at night.

...So including a mock battle disguised as Gagaku Festival preparations, they're going to be holding three different meetings during the day.

Mitotsudaira thought, *This is because the Testament Union's Aki is so close by.*

But that thought led to another:

“Thinking like this just shows I really am a Musashi resident, doesn’t it?”

She was a knight sent here from Hexagone Française. As a result of the dealings between Hexagone Française and the Testament Union, she had provisionally inherited the name of Mito Matsudaira. She had been sent as part of Hexagone Française’s preparations for the future of the Far East, so it was politically unclear if she would ultimately belong to Hexagone Française or the Far East. But...

...I have made up my own mind on the matter.

That said, there was nothing she could do in this situation.

The mysterious phenomenon purification and the Gagaku Festival were indeed different things.

The Testament Union’s statement bordered on harassment, but it was true that mysterious phenomenon purification was not a school lesson.

They had apparently discussed harassing the Testament Union in retaliation by holding a mysterious phenomenon purification near Aki during some time other than the Gagaku Festival, but....

...That would only cause more conflict with the Testament Union.

And the Musashi only had a limited supply of fuel. Each year, they were assigned some amount of fuel for the Gagaku Festival and they would use the excess for the mysterious phenomenon purification.

If they did not do it now, who could say when the *next* chance would come along.

This is so much trouble, sighed Mitotsudaira as she adjusted her grip on the container.

“Here I go!”

Just then, she heard a voice from beyond the approaching transport ship.

It was Adele.

Adele was training.

It was combat training.

The vassal unit was practicing a charge in case a mysterious phenomenon appeared on the theatre ship. That way they could respond if a Non-God Sword or Hidden Dragon appeared during the Gagaku Festival.

Of course, the Testament Union had stopped them from holding any kind of official training. But...

“Get ready!”

Tadayo stood on the far end of the deck while wearing an engine division work jacket.

Adele was on the stern and Tadayo was on the bow.

Tadayo lightly spun around a metal spear, but suddenly stopped it and gave a shout.

“Carry!!”

“Judge!!”

Adele and the rest of the vassal unit nodded and moved forward.

It was not spears or shields they held below their arms.

It was metal scaffolding pipes.

There were piles of other materials in the supply yard set up at the rear of the ship. They were carrying all of that to the bow and other places.

...And it works as training...!

Today, Adele was practicing wielding a spear or wielding a shield. She was currently holding a metal pipe as a spear and moving forward.

Some of the others held a plywood or armor panel as a shield and others carried a toolbox as the rear guard.

And they were all running toward...

“A god of war!”

A god of war stood there in place of a Non-God Sword.

Everyone ran in and threw their burden at its armored metal feet.

...Here I go!

Adele went all out.

Fighting a Non-God Sword was an important experience for her. It had used wind slashes like projectiles and she remembered crushing or dodging those to move forward. That was the same as the later fight against the Hidden Dragon:
...I can be proud of what I did there as a Musashi vassal!

Combat was rare on the Musashi, yet she had helped defeat such a powerful opponent.

And that would help more than just her. It was important for the vassal unit as a whole.

They had publically demonstrated that Musashi could fight.

So Adele held her spear at the ready and moved forward in a long slide.

“Let’s carry these supplies!”

She ran.

Adele felt the speed on the soles of her feet after a few steps.

She went for it.

The theatre ship’s deck gave them approximately 200 meters to run. With their body reinforcement spells, they could clear that in about 15 seconds.

The god of war at the supplies destination was 10 seconds away.

They would arrive in no time. Or they should have.

“Ah.”

A figure moved near the stage being constructed up ahead.

1st Special Duty Officer Watanabe stood atop the wood piled up in front of the stage.

She lightly waved her hand.

“1st Special Duty Unit...go take those supplies!”

It happened suddenly.

A few dozen figures appeared on the seemingly-empty deck.

The unit that worked for the 1st Special Duty Officer was primarily made up of ninjas and they had been hidden there. They were unarmed, but as soon as they lifted their hips...

“...Judge!”

They charged toward the vassal unit.

Oh, dear, thought Mitotsudaira as she watched the mock training.

The 1st Special Duty Unit had just made a counterattack on the charging vassal unit.

They all took curving paths on their way to clash with the vassals.

Mitotsudaira recognized those movements.

“Those are the Non-God Sword’s slashes.”

The reports on the battle and the damage to the Tanigawa Castle must have been used to work out the trajectories of the Non-God Sword’s slashes. She did not remember everything about it, but were there more slashes toward the center because that was where she had been?

This time, people in black made a counter charge in place of the slashes.

It was the 1st Special Duty Unit.

Those ninjas were generally unarmed and fought with ninja techniques and martial arts.

Their ninja techniques were wide ranging – including throws, rolls, and feints using the momentum of their approach.

Thus, their approach was a fast one. When the vassals stumbled in surprise from the sudden counterattack, they were knocked away, blocked, or stopped after the surprise of a feint.

“Ah, s-sorry, I didn’t mean to hug you like that! And it definitely had nothing

to do with you being a black-haired girl! Ah, no weapons! Please no! I prefer love! I prefer peace!”

“Shobahhh! Shubahhhh! Oh, those are slashing sound effects! I had to make them up, but they’re pretty cool, aren’t they?”

“Hi! Now, will I go right? Or will I go left? Ah ha ha! Just try to catch me. ... Why would you straight-up ignore me!?”

The 1st Special Duty Unit seemed confident, but the vassal unit had also been trained.

The vassal unit mercilessly sent the ninjas flying, just like the Non-God Sword’s slashes had been destroyed.

Of course, they did not actually carry weapons. Nor did they have the mobile shells that most vassals wore or the gauntlets that helped them grip their weapons.

When they came into contact, the pipes being used as spears flew through the air and plywood panels broke or slid along the floor.

Those who had finished their encounter exchanged looks with the others to check on their results, those who had dropped materials picked them up, and those who had not continued forward. However...

...The 1st Special Duty Unit only has so many people, so the number of slashes is limited.

So once they finished “carrying” those materials, each group would form up on the opposite ends of the ship as before and begin another clash.

But before that could happen, some of the vassals were still headed for the god of war.

Mitotsudaira saw a familiar face among them.

“That’s Adele, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” agreed Asama next to her. Her sign frame displayed an overhead map of the Fushimi Castle. The image of the 200m field showed the paths and results of the people moving back and forth from bow to stern.

Adele was in one of the groups that had not been stopped and was still running.

And Asama said something.

It happened just as the transport ship rocked lightly from arriving at the Fushimi Castle.

“Tenzou-kun is charging in from the very back of the ship.”

Tenzou had joined the last row of those reproducing the slashes.

He had not done so for any real reason.

...I was just running late because of the mess at the cosplay teahouse!

At the end of the shrine maiden time, the entire class had finally gotten the hang of their assigned roles and was picking up on what they excelled at or had trouble with.

He had needed to prepare for this “supply carrying”, so he had needed to leave with Adele.

His plan had been to be back at the end of the samurai genre which was the time after the next. The Technohexen genre came after samurai and Naito and Naruze would handle that, so he could work in the back and let them work out front.

The problem was the idiot.

Yes, it was that idiot's fault, thought Tenzou.

Just as they were preparing to leave, the idiot and his sister called over Adele who was trying to change out of her shrine maiden costume and into her uniform.

“Hey, Adele, Adele. I have something weird here.”

“Eh? What is it, Toori-san.”

“Silly girl, I am Aoko-san right now! Don't use my real name! Got it, Adele?”

Now, what's my name!?"

"Aoko-san."

"Nope, too bad. My name is Toori. Aoko is who I *am* right now. Tee hee."

"A doctor! Is anyone in here a doctor!? And I mean a brain doctor! A surgeon would work too, I think! ...Oh, Asama-san, can you take care of this!?"

"Wh-why are passing this off to me!? I have to get over to the theatre ship with Mito!"

At any rate, the idiot had gotten a little *too* into character, so he really did look like a girl.

But the idiot sister placed a hand on her cheek and spoke to Adele.

"Listen, Adele. I have this set I brought in order to get Neshinbara to crossdress."

"I will *never* wear that!!"

"Heh heh. You're an amateur author and you can't even crossdress!? Do you even have a dick!?"

"I have no idea what that is supposed to mean," said Tenzou. "But what is going on?"

"Huh!? You don't get it, Tenzou!? I want Adele to try on the giant boobs attachment from this Ootsubaki crossdressing set as an experim-...so she can experience what it's like to be busty!"

"K-Kimi-san, you let your real motivation slip in there, didn't you!?"

"Adele!" Kimi placed her hands on Adele's shoulders. "Listen! Motivations and pretext aren't what matter! It's all about the result! Yes, anything goes if it's funny!"

"That's what I mean by your motivation!!"

But Adele must have always wanted to try it out once. With a "I might as well" atmosphere, she stepped out of the changing space with a much greater "size".

"Wh-what do you think?"

She had even changed into an inner suit for large breasts. Ohiroshiki, whose senior priest costume bore the words “Life Worshiper”, looked at her and elbowed Tenzou.

“What is it, Ohiroshiki-dono? Are you shocked that Adele-dono has become a busty loli?”

“Huh? Any age in the double digits is an old hag, so Adele-kun is as much an old hag as anyone. Old haggy is equal to all. What are you even talking about? Anyway, Tenzou-kun...isn't this your genre? Busty blondes?”

Tenzou gave Adele another look. And...

...Nh?

He placed a hand on his forehead and spoke up without thinking.

“Adele-dono.”

“Eh? What do you think as a busty blonde sommelier, Tenzou-san?”

“Judge. ...When you walk, hold your shoulders a little stiffer like this. ...Yes, and catch the jiggling on your curved breastbone... Yes, yes, yes. Just like that.”

But...

“Those are undeniably fake.”

“Th-that is the worst! That is just the worst thing you could have said!”

“That's right!” said the other girls as they took Adele's side.

“Tenzou-kun, couldn't you at least compliment Adele after having her pretend to be busty for your own amusement!?”

“That's right! And after she did something so humiliating not even I could do it in public!”

“Hey, Adele. I really don't think you should have done that.”

“Wh-why am I being attacked by everyone who took my side!?”

That was when the two Technohexen entered through the window. They were both riding Naito's broom. Naruze gave Tenzou and Adele a surprised look and then looked to Tenzou again.

“I see.” She nodded. “You are the worst.”

“Th-that was sudden!?”

“...Then I’ll compromise and call you scum.”

“That’s even worse!”

“Now, now,” intervened High Priest Neshinbara. He gave a solemn nod.
“Crossunite-kun.”

He must have found a good compromise. He lightly swished his costume that bore the words “Dream Big” and placed a hand on his forehead. There was no purpose to those actions. He probably just thought it looked cool.

And he took a breath before continuing.

“Listen, Crossunite-kun. At times like this, you should start by complimenting how Balfette-kun looks. After all, she is wearing something different from normal. Otherwise, she will not be able to enjoy crossdressing like this.”

“I-I am not crossdressing! I increased my bust size!!”

“...Oh, sorry.”

“You are the worst.”

“W-wait, Naruze-kun! By those standards, if I accept that Balfette-kun has increased her bust size (fake though it may be), will I become ‘the best’!?”

“...Then you would be a creep.”

“You could stand to be less harsh, Naruze-dono!”

That led into the usual pattern of everyone snapping at each other in turn.

It ended with Itoken and Nenji’s opinion of Adele’s increased size.

“Adele-kun, it is best to be yourself.”

“Indeed. You do not grow from taking in more liquids like I do. So instead of seeking dramatic change, you should live each day to its fullest. What matters most is not growth; it is health. You are quite healthy from running with those dogs every day and what could be better than that? In a way, you have achieved what is best for yourself without even noticing, so that may be why

you are looking for something else.”

After some applause from the customers, it came to an end.

The customers may have thought it was some kind of skit. But did that make it all acceptable or not?

...Still...

Is our class really okay acting like that? wondered Tenzou as he accelerated his charge and looked ahead.

The opponent in front of him was a 3rd-year vassal. It was a girl and she was charging toward him.

She was 2 meters away.

And upon closer inspection, this opponent was blonde and...

...She just barely qualifies as busty...!

That assessment put Tenzou in an entirely different mood as he dashed forward.

Tenzou checked to either side as he ran.

No one else was headed for this target.

That meant no one was watching him. So...

...Ninja Technique: Staring Mode!

He mentally shouted the technique name and looked ahead to see what he expected.

...They are jiggling!

And naturally.

Yes, natural giant breasts did not jiggle along a central axis like in games. The breasts were attached by the entire surface area, so they would not jiggle as a separate object.

He was glad to be alive.

And his current mission was to stop the vassal unit's charge. So...

"I will stop her...!"

He would stop this charging opponent as part of their training. Not because of his personal interests. Not for any personal benefit either. *This is crucial training for handling mysterious phenomena at the Gagaku Festival.*

He had an excuse.

But he wanted to avoid knocking her down or sending her flying when he stopped her. They might be in different years, but they were comrades from the same academy, regardless of how she might see things.

He could see the others going all out on this, but given his faith and interests... no, solely to ensure she could do her duty in the upcoming mission, he wanted to avoid the possibility of injury.

But he would stop her.

So how was he to do that?

...Can I use my hands?

I can!

...Can I grab her tight with both hands?

I can!!

...Can I then knock her down onto the deck with me?

I can!!! ...I might get in trouble for it afterwards, though.

"But this training is important!"

He used a step to match their pace and the distance between them and he charged in.

...Wait for me, busty blonde!

"Scarred? Sneezing again?"

"Eh? ...Oh, yes. A wind spirit just tickled my nose. I think it is a sign of good things to come, but since spring is already over, maybe it's talking about

something coming next year.”

Tenzou ran with his hand at the ready.

He would hit. He would make it. He would grab them.

...They're mine!

But just then, the approaching large breasts suddenly jiggled to the side.

It was a feint.

“What...!?”

Wait, he thought.

Leave me not, big boobs.

...Ah, I think I'm turning into a poet...

Regardless, his opponent had definitely shifted her path.

She had never been planning on hitting him. She had been drawing him in before dodging.

He should have been able to read that in her movements, but he had been too distracted by the diversion in front of him. Also, he was supposed to be a slash, so there was no point in reading someone's feint.

She had shifted to the side, so if he kept going like this, he would run right past the busty blonde with his hands held at the ready.

Farewell, big boobs.

But he had to decide whether or not he would pursue those big boobs to reproduce the homing aspect of the slash.

If he forcibly leaned over now, he could go after her.

What would he do? *What should I do?*

“...Oh.”

There was an enemy in front of him.

It was not that the busty blonde had moved back to her original path.

There was someone behind her to crush the slash after the vanguard escaped it with a feint.

This other person was also blonde, but there was a major difference from the other girl.

“Adele-dono?”

She was not busty.

Asama saw something as she and Mitotsudaira crossed the bridge to the theatre ship.

“Huh?”

Near the god of war at the bow of the theatre ship, Tenzou suddenly lost all motivation.

They were training and she had seen him making an incredible dash on her diagram.

But just now, his legs slowed to a walk and his shoulders drooped.

“Tenzou?” asked Mitotsudaira with a questioning tone.

Just then, Adele sent Tenzou flying with a direct hit from her metal pipe.

At the same time, a whistle blew at the bow. Tadayo picked up and swung her spear.

“Okay, that ends the first round of supply carrying! You, ninja over there! What in the world are you doing!?”

After being knocked away and rolling thrice, Tenzou got up and lowered his head.

“S-sorry! The great sense of loss shined a light on my shameful actions!”

“I-I don’t know what that’s supposed to mean,” said Adele. “But I feel like I should be angry at you for that complete lack of motivation. I should be, shouldn’t I!?”

“Yeah, I don’t really get it either,” said Tadayo. “But you survived the charge,

Balfette, so take the back row next time.”

They were going to continue the supply carrying.

“Mito, you’re going to join in now, aren’t you?”

“Yes. Tomo, you’re going to fire some arrows to ‘take some measurements’, right?”

“Yes. Only some preliminary ones, though.”

The supply carrying would continue periodically until the Gagaku Festival. That allowed as many people as possible to participate, and all of their actions would be retained as data which could be shared in a virtual space.

That way even those who could not participate in the supply carrying could still learn from it. That was the best way of ensuring nothing unexpected occurred on the day of the festival.

The first day was being used to reproduce the appearance of the Non-God Sword.

The next day would be used to reproduce the appearance of the Hidden Dragon.

The day after that would be used for practicing the Gagaku Festival plan.

They had limited time, but they would gradually come to understand their opponent and confirm what they could do themselves.

That was the basic idea. Still...

“We have the School Festival as well, so this is a lot of work,” said Asama.

“For tomorrow’s supply carrying, we will only be participating after the fact using everyone else’s combined data, right?” asked Mitotsudaira.

“That’s right. The Hidden Dragon is large, so we figured it would be best having everyone reproduce its actions without us. ...We’ll join in after the cosplay teahouse closes for the day, so we need to...”

She wanted to say “work hard at the teahouse”, but she felt the need to put it a different way.

“Keep Toori-kun and Kimi under control at the teahouse.”

“M-me too!?”

Asama gave Mitotsudaira a look of “of course you too” as they finished crossing the bridge to the theatre ship.

This ship would be a battlefield soon.

And not just for the mysterious phenomena purification. For the Gagaku Festival as well.

“Hi, how’s it going, Watanabe?”

Watanabe turned back toward a voice coming from the stairs climbing up from below the stage.

“...Suga-kun.”

“Judge.” Oosuga held large bundles of what looked like thin paper in both hands. “Back when it was the Tanigawa Castle, the ship was apparently used in place of a shrine since it’s a theatre ship. The storage below deck is full of doujinshis meant to be burned for purification.”

“You sure they aren’t just for ballast?”

“They’re pretty old for that. I mean, here’s a Ronin Troopers one. We were in elementary school when that was popular.”

“The earth element guy was useless in that one, right? I remember arguing with the girls in our class over who the best one was.”

“When you see this, don’t you want to see if the officers at the time were like us?”

“No, I don’t,” replied Watanabe with a bitter smile.

Hearing that, Oosuga looked to the deck where he saw Tadayo and...

“Hey, the vassal unit is headed back next, right? Have them carry these too.”

“I have a feeling some idiot will take them home with him.”

“Really?”

“If a boy finds himself with the chance to take a book filled with naked

women, most of them will take it.”

“That’s where you’re wrong,” said Oosuga as he stepped down from the stage with the doujinshis.

He looked straight ahead into the distant sky.

“Those who have awoken to their faith will not be stopped by any old temptation.”

“...What if it was a wife doujinshi?”

“I would follow my faith and take it home with me. I mean, obviously.”

“Addressing that properly would be way too much work, but what if there was a wife one among those you have there?”

“I removed it.”

“Interesting use of the past tense.”

“Hey.” Tadayo glared at Watanabe. “If you have something to say, just say it.”

“Nothing I say could fix you.”

Watanabe was not smiling, but there was no sarcasm or gloominess in her expression. That briefly stopped Tadayo from speaking.

And after a moment...

“Well, that is true.”

“And you used to be so pure.”

Tadayo listened to Watanabe.

“When you would notice an abandoned porn magazine by the river in the nature district on the way to school, you and Torii-kun would run to grab it afterschool.”

“I do have to wonder why Torii was so into it,” said Tadayo. “But what you described is far from pure.”

“But he didn’t go on and on about wives.”

“Didn’t you say nothing you said could fix him?”

Watanabe followed Oosuga’s back with her eyes. She saw him pile the bundles of doujinshis up with the supplies and materials by the stage.

“Okay, we have an extra job for the vassal unit. ...Tadayo-san, can you do that?”

“Oh, judge, judge.”

Tadayo opened her mouth with obvious disappointment in having her question dodged.

“When did we start keeping secrets from each other?”

“I’m not keeping any secrets.”

“Should the 1st Special Duty Officer really say that?”

“Judge,” said Watanabe. “Some things just aren’t worth saying. ...So what am I supposed to do when someone claims I’m keeping secrets just because I didn’t say something that *isn’t worth saying*?”

“Call them a stalker or overly possessive?”

“Judge. Besides,” said Watanabe. “I’m the odd one out in our group, so you haven’t told me anything about that, have you?”

“Ohh,” said Tadayo as she chose her words carefully.

She knew what Watanabe meant in terms of the current situation.

Things were already in motion and they were doing everything they could about it. So...

“It’s not like you could do anything even if you were told.”

“Y’know...”

Watanabe tilted her head in slight disappointment and pointed forward.

She pointed at the doujinshi bundles at Oosuga’s feet.

“If I couldn’t do anything even if I’m told, then asking isn’t going to do me any good either. So that just leaves preparing for the result. ...Please hurry up and carry those away.”

“What does that mean, Neshinbara? Why is Watanabe different from the other officers and name inheritors in the third year?”

Naruze asked a question through the classroom changing area’s partition curtain while she helped Suzu remove her samurai costume.

“That 1st Special Duty Officer uses a metal spear, so she has the same weapon type as Ookubo and her cowling spear. ...The only thing I can think of is her blonde hair.”

“No, no. It’s not about her appearance. ...Oh, do you have a Technomagie hat over there?”

“W-we...do?”

Suzu moved to the wicker basket at the back of the partition.

“Oh, dear. You’re still topless,” said Naruze as she held the left side of Suzu’s removed samurai cowling in her left hand and opened a crop mark frame Magie Figur in her right hand. She then began sketching Suzu’s butt as the girl leaned over to reach inside the wicker basket.

...Oh, so that’s how such a slender body sways when wearing the heavy skirt of a tassets cowling...

Being able to learn new things needed for drawing and to be able to immediately check on them was nothing less than a joy for an artist.

Excellent, Suzu. Just stick your butt up a little more... Oh, good, good. Yes, yes. Now tense up a little...yes, yes, yes.

“Ga-chan, what has you all excited?”

“Eh? Oh, judge. Well, Margot, why wouldn’t I be excited with the school festival going on?”

“Th-there it is. It was right on...top.”

Eh? she thought as she turned around to find Suzu holding a white boy’s Technomagie hat.

She had not yet finished sketching Suzu.

...And yet...!

“Neshinbaraaaa!! Why was your hat found right away!?”

“Huh!?” he shouted from beyond the partition. “These absurd accusations are hardly new, but did I even *do* anything!?”

The changing boys saw a Weiss Hexen slip past the curtain and walk in.

“Wah!” Itoken took a half-step back. “Naruze-kun! We’re changing in here, so we’re naked!”

“You’re always naked!”

“Calm down, Naruze!” said Nenji. “Neshinbara might be at fault, but intruding on our changing room is not rational!”

“Wait! Why are you saying I might be at fault!?”

“Huh!? You just prevented me from growing as an artist! I had a rare chance to sketch Suzu seminude! I mean, when am I ever going to have another chance to draw a seminude samurai Suzu!?”

“Someone! Someone please! There’s a pervert in here!!”

“No one’s going to come,” said Noriki who had already prepared his white mage outfit.

“What’s with you?” asked Naruze. “You just wrapped some bandages around your stomach and put on a Techno Mage jacket? Do you like showing off your body?”

“The inner suit *top* restricts your movements and it’s expensive. I can’t spend that much money on a costume.” Noriki sighed and sat on the desk they were stacking things on top of. “In all seriousness, even if you send someone to the guards, most of the 1st Special Duty Unit and other enforcers are on the Fushimi Castle right now. A Public Morals Committee member might be able to do something, but Asama is over there too.”

“And I bet our teacher is at the cafeteria having a feast on everything the cooking club is putting out with nearly-expired ingredients.”

The Weiss Hexen passed Neshinbara his hat as if to hide his sigh.

“Well, aren’t you lucky. Sounds like you won’t have to visit the guards. ...But did we really have the budget for all these costumes?”

He took the hat and frowned at Naruze’s question.

“We all pitched in, remember? We even discussed whether Honda-kun would be able to pay her share.”

“Oh, yeah.”

It seemed to come back to Naruze.

“She started looking for a part-time job after that, didn’t she? ...Sorry, I was drawing up a manuscript back then, so I wasn’t really listening. Did I actually pay my share?”

“You paid three shares just like Augesvarer-kun told you to. Were you too busy with your manuscript to notice?”

“Curse that girl...”

The Technohexen bit her nail and clicked her tongue and Neshinbara sighed.

“Anything else you want to ask?”

“What? You’ll let me draw it?”

“Not that. About Watanabe.”

“Oh, I completely forgot. ...So how is she the odd one out?”

“I knew it,” muttered Neshinbara, but he soon stood tall once more.

He pushed his glasses back up his nose and donned the white mage hat he had been given.

“Think of the current officers: Torii Mototada, Ookubo Tadayo, Oosuga Yasutaka, and Watanabe Moritsuna. Of them, only Watanabe Moritsuna survives to the Battle of Sekigahara.”

Naito focused on Neshinbara’s voice beyond the curtain while she helped Suzu change.

...Samurai fashion sure is flashy...

Suzu's was mostly handmade, so it was of course not meant for battle. But it still took time to change in and out of, so Naito was impressed that people used to wear things like this.

"Okay, Bell-rin. It's all off."

"O-okay. Thanks."

Meanwhile, she heard Neshinbara's voice.

"Listen."

He was talking about their upperclassmen. They were familiar faces at the meetings about the Gagaku Festival and during the recent mysterious phenomena incidents. Except those upperclassmen probably did not know them very well and they did not know those upperclassmen on a personal level.

That was who Neshinbara was talking about.

...I'm not really sure it's worth listening to.

"In the Testament, the first of them to die is Oosuga Yasutaka, the second is Ookubo Tadayo, and the third is Torii Mototada. They die before the Battle of Sekigahara, so they do not see their lord, Matsudaira, begin his reign."

...I see.

Naito pulled Suzu's Schwarz Hexen costume out of the wicker basket. She handed it to Suzu in order, starting with the inner suit, while speaking.

"Bara-yan, can I cut in?"

"Yes, go ahead."

"Then...does that even matter to our upperclassmen? It's pretty common to fudge the years for name inheritors and history recreations."

"I had a feeling someone would say that, but this is more than just gossip. ... There is one thing that has my attention about this, but it is something I believe I have already told you about."

Naito frowned at that.

...Has Bara-yan told us anything about our upperclassmen?

He had.

“That you want their signatures?”

“Yes,” replied Naruze from the boys changing room. “You’re gathering signatures of pre-Sekigahara commanders and post-Sekigahara commanders separately, aren’t you? The ones who took over the world and the ones who didn’t.”

“If I based it on taking over the world, I wouldn’t have much to collect.”

“Then what is it?”

When she asked that, Naito sensed Neshinbara’s attention shift from Naruze to her. And...

“I told you about the Siege of Fushimi Castle, didn’t I?”

“That’s when Suzuki Magoichi, who is currently visiting Musashi, kills Torii Mototada, right?”

“Right,” he said. He continued without a moment’s delay. “The Siege of Fushimi Castle is one of the battles leading into the Battle of Sekigahara. If anything like that happens on the Fushimi Castle,” said Neshinbara. “It will mean the Far East is the very first nation to do a history recreation immediately preceding Sekigahara. ...Of course, Watanabe Moritsuna was at that battle too, but that upperclassman is currently the 1st Special Duty Officer.”

“You mean...?”

She understood what Neshinbara was trying to say. Or she thought she did.

“So,” began Naito. “Watanabe’s job is to stop Magoichi from doing anything like that?”

“Now.” Watanabe called out to the 1st Special Duty Unit that had returned from the stern. “Next, split up into two groups and perform the supply carrying one group at a time. ...Watch how the other team moves and use that to inspire and correct your own actions.”

On the distant stern, the vassal unit was down on their knees catching their breath.

Tadayo swung up her cowling spear as she walked over to them.

“Okay, everyone! Back on your feet!”

She’s pretty strict, thought Watanabe as she spotted someone past Tadayo’s back.

...Is that...?

It was the Asama Shrine Representative and the provisional Mito Lord.

They stood on the open-air bridge where they were speaking with “Musashino” who was managing the Gagaku Festival.

They were likely confirming some things about the supply carrying and other work. The Asama Shrine Representative would occasionally raise her lightly-clenched left hand toward them, so she may have been keeping track of the firing timing.

She would be joining them soon.

“Now,” said Watanabe quietly. “Are you ready to do some things that aren’t worth telling anyone about?”

Tenzou built his resolve after completing his return trip in the supply carrying.

...I will do it right next time.

He would stop a vassal.

Specifically, the 3rd-year busty blonde vassal.

She was the one who had slipped past him with a feint and allowed Adele’s attack to hit him.

This was not for vindication, but while some of the 1st Special Duty Unit had been dodged or knocked over in the initial clash, none of the others had been dodged and then sent flying like he had.

He could not allow that.

Since his father was a ninja instructor, people saw him as a star student whether he liked it or not. He wanted to say he did not really care, but...

...This is my father we're talking about...

That morning, he had woken up to find a note from his mother saying "I have gone to the nature district river with your father" and all of his father's hidden porn games stacked up on the table. *I wonder how she is going to punish him this time.*

At any rate, he had to focus on the challenge before him.

The vassal unit had reversed their formation to the left and right on the way back.

And on this second time across...

"Have they reversed it front to back?"

Adele was directly ahead of him. So the busty blonde third year would be behind her.

That girl was his true target.

But he could not see behind Adele at the moment.

That was due to the shield she was carrying.

She no longer held a metal pipe meant to look like a spear. This time, she carried a large and flat piece of scaffolding.

He had seen the records of the battle against the Non-God Sword and he recalled that Adele had moved forward while using a spell defense barrier as a shield. She had even smashed the Non-God Sword with the shield.

On this second time across, Adele was moving forward to provide an example.

That meant he would have to stop her.

...I have to defeat Adele-dono!?

Just as he thought that, he realized something.

...Mh?

Adele was providing an example that the others were to follow.

So wouldn't it be more helpful if he let her defeat him instead of defeating her? If he did go out and defeat her...

"Wh-why are you so bad at reading between the lines, Tenzou-san!?"

"That's right. This is the supply carrying for fighting the Non-God Sword."

"Now, now. It's Tenzou-kun, so he can't really help it."

"Tenzou, you are the worst."

"That he is. I'll have a surprise for him at the next event."

He ended up imaging people who were not even here, but it all seemed frighteningly accurate.

He tried to figure out what to do, and...

"...Watanabe-sama?"

"Yes?"

Watanabe was blonde too, but she was not all that busty and fell outside of his range. Besides, she had Oosuga, which placed her in the wife genre.

So he asked his question without any anxiety or nerves.

"Is Adele-dono demonstrating a technique for use against the Non-God Sword?"

"Huh? Well..."

She tilted her head and cupped her hands around her mouth.

She sent her voice to Tadayo on the far end of the deck. However...

"———"

He could not hear what she said. She must have been using either a ninja technique or a spell to alter the directionality of her voice so that only Tadayo could hear.

Tadayo turned toward them on the bow and answered with her cowering spear resting on her shoulder.

"Do you think that would be a good idea!?"

Her voice was loud enough to shake the deck. She was apparently using some kind of spell.

A ninja needed to covertly provide instructions to individuals.

A knight or vassal needed to provide commands to the entire group.

...I see.

The black-haired knight held a cowering spear and the blonde ninja held a metal spear.

They had their similarities and their differences, but they worked well as a team.

Watanabe sent a few more words and Tadayo answered.

“Then that sounds good to me!”

What sounded good to her?

Watanabe nodded and lowered her hands from her mouth.

“Tenzou-kun, she is not demonstrating anything.”

“I-is that so!?” He tried to hide his true intentions here. “Then I do not need to hold back?”

“Oh, but, Tenzou-kun, if you lose next time, that’s two losses in a row against Adele-san.”

...Eh?

He looked out ahead and saw Adele rolling up her track suit sleeves and tucking them up with bands. She then started spinning her right arm around and looking straight at him.

“Time for a second win!”

I need to stop her, realized Tenzou.

Adele liked to run.

She always thought so when she ran, but the thought had been more prominent lately.

After all, she was not running just for fun or for class.

She was running to fulfill her role on the battlefield by offering up her whole self.

She could not do that when walking the dogs.

...Then again, by running out ahead, I do make sure the pack doesn't scatter.

She could describe that as having a role to play in a team working to accomplish something.

This was the same.

“Begin!!”

She ran out ahead after hearing Tadayo's shout.

She was not demonstrating how to fight the Non-God Sword. Nor was she taking the lead to recreate the circumstances of that fight.

This was simply her first turn at the front of the formation.

Her equipment was modeled after a spell shield, so everyone would be focused on her actions.

She wanted to do a good job so they could see how it was done. But...

...It's Tenzou-san!

She knew how skilled a ninja he was.

She often saw him demonstrate his prowess in stealth, reconnaissance, infiltration, delaying, and information management.

“When we're running late, the classroom infiltration missions he leads while avoiding the teacher are incredible.”

There were also the mock battles they held in gym class. During the battles held in the city, he could use his leadership, guidance, and diversions to give them all more time.

It was based on Neshinbara's eye for strategy, but the behind-the-scenes work bringing them closer to the ideal was mostly reliant on him.

A vassal also supported those on the battlefield, but...

...My role is more in the open.

A ninja generally guided their allies or sabotaged the enemy on the battlefield, so her role was to be the first one down the path he had paved.

A ninja paved the path and guided them down it.

A vassal traveled down the path to prove its validity and support the others.

The two roles had a give-and-take relationship.

And the person on the other end of the scales was now coming for her.

He was fast.

Adele recalled that Tenzou was the only one in their class who was faster than her.

His endurance was probably also greater than hers. He was even superior to her as an athlete.

Then, thought Adele.

...How is he any different from a Non-God Sword!?

A Non-God Sword's power, height, and speed were all greater than hers.

So why had she defeated it?

"Because I wasn't alone!"

Adele ran.

She moved to directly intercept Tenzou while she opened her mouth and raised her voice.

"I can't lose if my opponent is single!"

She is using a psychological attack, thought Tenzou.

...I never thought Adele-dono would use diversionary tactics!

A type of *kotodama* attack known as an Eloquence Attack was a shrine maiden's specialty. It was a mystery why most of the girls in their class could use it, but that may have been Asama's influence. But it was impressive that

Adele could use it in combat.

He realized the girl running to his right had slowed her pace. She must have taken a direct hit.

He heard the voice of the boy holding his chest and running to his left.

“Hey! If the hit didn’t affect you, then say something back!”

“Judge!”

Tenzou gathered his strength and responded. *It is true I wouldn’t be affected by that.* After all...

“I am not single!” he shouted back at Adele. “Because I have a wife I’m in the process of winning in a porn game!!”

Smoking Girl: “Huh? ...What did he just say?”

10ZO: “You don’t have to say that with such disgust, you know?”

Flat Vassal: “...Um, sorry, everyone, but Tenzou-san just said something weird to me. Is this his form of coming out?”

Me: “Also, Tenzou, the girl you’re going after in that game only has a bad end. You can’t keep her from being executed.”

10ZO: “D-don’t give me spoilers in the middle of training! And in that case, I’ll have to write the developers and have them put out a new edition with an extra scenario!”

Asama: “Um, sorry. This line is just for testing the system, so everything you say is being recorded...”

At any rate, Tenzou made his charge.

His opponent was Adele. She was blonde and flat-... *No, a ninja needs to show mercy... She is a classmate and we have known each other a long time...*

So he made his way straight toward her.

She removed the scaffolding material from her back and held it out like a spell

shield.

If she hit and stopped him with that, she would win.

If he deflected it and made it through, he would win.

But he had a handicap here.

At the moment, he was a Non-God Sword slash rather than a ninja.

That prevented him from using any intricate tricks.

...But come to think of it, Adele-dono could not use that kotodama attack against a Non-God Sword.

I also doubt a Non-God Sword would respond to it with a porn game wife, but perhaps one might understand the glory of busty blondes. Yes, I must not reject the possibility.

“...Oh.”

The shield was right in front of him.

It was large. The scaffolding material was 120cm tall and 60cm wide.

It pushed at the wind as it approached him. And...

...Such splendid movement!

Its speed did not drop as it thrust toward him.

When making a shield attack during a high-speed run, it was only natural for the wind pressure to slow it.

But Adele was different. She thrust it forward at an angle that erased the powerful wind pressure hitting the shield.

She converted the momentum of her run into a blunt weapon blow.

From his perspective, the attack seemed to scoop up from the ground.

...That's a counterattack aiming for my solar plexus to my lower chest!

A hit from that would not end well for him.

It was a shield attack, but he would be hit by the top instead of the flat surface. It was like being hit by the vertical edge of a book.

Tenzou thought, *Huh? Is Adele-dono serious about this?*

But the attack from below was an immediate one.

He had to react.

The Non-God Sword's slashes tackled their opponent and detonated themselves.

Dodging was not an option for him. If he did so, it was only if he collided with her but was not broken.

He would have to knock Adele away and keep going.

So what was he to do?

When an opponent made a shield attack, one normally dodged it or jumped over it to attack while passing them by. Shields were heavy, so there was little chance of them making another attack once you were passed it.

But what if you could not dodge and had to hit it?

...You attack somewhere they can't cover with the shield. Like at their feet!

In that case, thought Tenzou as he charged in.

He moved straight toward Adele as she made her shield attack from below.

And he of course went low.

He tried to force his way below the counterattacking shield.

Adele saw Tenzou's movement.

He charged in at her while somewhat crouched and turned with his right shoulder forward.

His hips were very low, but...

...The shield isn't high enough for you to get under it!

At this rate, the upper edge of the shield would hit him in the face.

That would do a lot of damage. And his acceleration toward her would only add to the damage.

But, she thought. Tenzou-san must have something up his sleeve.

He was not the type to recklessly rush in without a plan.

A ninja's role was to prepare and guide everyone to victory. That would remain the same on the individual level.

But, she thought again. He does sometimes get lost in his own plans.

He would sometimes confess to a busty blonde and get shot down, but those failures were almost certainly caused by him overthinking things. He would essentially set himself up for defeat.

That was not a good thing.

But what about this time? And...

"I'll do it too...!"

She would do everything she could.

If he was trying to slip below her shield...

...I'll go even lower!

She further lowered the shield as she swung it along a pendulum-like trajectory. That was easily done by lowering her hips. She was shorter than Tenzou, so she had the advantage when it came to getting lower to the ground.

She would hit him.

She did not hesitate to work toward that goal.

Asama turned around at about the same time as she heard Adele's scream.

The first thing she saw was her vassal classmate flying through the air.

"Owaaaahhh?"

But Adele had not simply been sent flying.

She was practically sitting on the shield she had been using.

The shield flew through the air with her sitting on it and ultimately made a full rotation.

“Ahhhh!”

That was when she was thrown off.

Tenzou was below it all.

He had collided with Adele as one of the slashes, but...

“Is that...?”

She saw he had lowered his body by sliding with his right leg in the lead.

But simply lowering to the deck like that would not have allowed him to respond to Adele’s ultra-low-altitude shield attack.

He had used a trick to pull off that seemingly-impossible response.

...A ninja sword?

He normally carried it on the back of his waist.

It was now held in the toes of his leading right foot.

Asama understood what he had done.

He had kicked the ninja sword to strike Adele’s legs as she made her shield attack.

Timing-wise, it had knocked her legs out from under her half a step in advance.

She had shifted her center of gravity forward, so the unexpected attack had knocked her off balance.

When swinging forward something as large as that scaffolding material, your body tended to stray forward.

And when lowering her body to hit Tenzou more quickly, she would have leaned forward even more.

Adele had had her legs swept out from under her through the shield obstacle.

“He must have moved underneath the shield when Adele-sama accidentally lifted it along with her own body. Over.”

“Musashino” was correct and the rest was simple.

Tenzou slipped below the lifted shield and placed it on his hips to launch it upwards.

Adele had been on top of it and could not stop her own momentum.

“Owwwww!!”

So she was sent flying before crashing back down to the deck.

Next, Tenzou stood up.

His actions as a slash were not yet over.

Tenzou had a chance at victory.

...Boobs!!

The 3rd-year with blonde hair and boobs would be behind Adele.

He had knocked away Adele, so...

...Can I interpret that as earning the right to a grope!?

I can, can't I? Yes, it's fine every once in a while, right? I couldn't do it before and this is the supply carrying, so it should be fine. Besides, this would all be meaningless if I didn't stop her and just let her go past.

Also, he was crouched low right now.

That placed him in the blind spot of those large breasts. There were times when Asama had to look for the cokepen on her desk because her breasts blocked it from view, but the same situation was occurring on the battlefield.

...I must act like a cokepen here!

“Okay...!”

He moved forward so the large breasts would be overhead.

Or they should have been.

For some reason, Mitotsudaira was there.

Asama saw Tenzou freeze up and get hit by Mitotsudaira.

...Ow.

It was a solid blow that made her wince just watching it.

The material shield dug into the ninja's gut and sent him flying while doubled over in actual < shape.

She heard the impact, Mitotsudaira continued to run, and...

"Here we go!"

"Judge!!"

Upon seeing the Rank 1 Knight's results, the vassal unit ran forward.

...Placing Mito behind Adele was meant to better reproduce the battle the other day, wasn't it?

But...

"Tenzou-kun, what were you doing back there?"

"Tenzou... You mean the son of Ninja Instructor Crossunite-sama? Over."

"Musashino" had apparently referenced her shared memories as she watched Tenzou fall head-first toward the deck.

She tilted her head.

"He seemed entirely defenseless for a moment there. Why? Over."

Asama was not sure herself. However...

"His motivation seemed to rapidly vanish as soon as he saw Mito."

"Should we assume he intentionally took the hit to give Mitotsudaira-sama that result? Over."

That was the nicest interpretation and would probably be best for Tenzou.

So Asama nodded and decided to join in next time. And...

"Okay, that completes the second run across!"

She heard Watanabe's voice and turned around to see Mitotsudaira waving from the stage.

The Cerberus was mimicking the action on her head, so it seemed to be in a

good mood.

“I see.”

Asama bowed toward “Musashino” and walked out onto the deck. She pulled a cord from each sleeve and tied back the sleeves.

“Asama Shrine Representative Class 2-Plum Asama Tomo. ...I am here to inspect the ‘supply carrying’!”

The first day of the Spring School Festival functioned as practice for the days to follow.

They followed the same schedule each year, but the events were different each year. There was some confusion inside and outside the academy as time approached, but “Musashi” had the following overall assessment: “I have determined everyone has settled down a fair bit. Over.”

In Class 2-Plum, Shirojiro counted their sales on his fingers.

“Huh? What is your problem, Toori? Counting on your fingers is best. Are you too stupid to understand!?”

He was being his usual self, but he predicted that their costume budget would last until the afternoon of the second day, so Suzu was relieved since she was in charge of costumes.

They all prepared for the second day and left for personal matters during the evening, but a few of the girls gathered at a certain location: Dangerous Waters, the Mukai family bathhouse in the Musashino underground area.

Her parents had figured Suzu would be exhausted today, so they were running the Suzu’s Bath on Okutama. Dangerous Waters was the main bathhouse, but it was half closed for the day.

“We’re here to help with the maintenance and cleaning!!”

They were using the place as a practice studio for the Gagaku Festival.

Chapter 10: Defenseless Girl in a Place of Skin Contact

第十章

『肌合わせ場所の無防備娘』



今日は何でこんな
転びまくりですか——!?

配点 (足下)

Why am I tripping

So much today!?

Point Allocation (Below Your Feet)

Naruze was working on the furnace at Dangerous Waters's women's bath.

At the bottom of the drained tub, she was checking the heating element that was visible with the wooden frame removed.

...That said, messing with the boiler would be a pain, so I won't do that.

Machines were Naomasa's specialty and she was currently in the boiler room around back.

Smoking Girl: "It uses standard heat sterilization by boiling the water with spells and Musashi's internal-combustion boiler. Suzu's Bath focuses more on the spells, but that might be because Asama's place is there on Okutama."

Asama: "Yes. Okutama has the academy and a lot of student housing, so the internal-combustion boiler's output is sent there. That doesn't leave enough boiler power for a bathhouse's water, which could be dangerous, so Okutama's bathhouses primarily use spells."

Bell: "Will it be...okay?"

"Yes, I can see the spell conduction rate from above, so it'll be fine."

Naruze spoke directly to Suzu who was scrubbing the tub floor nearby.

The girl wore a bathhouse swimsuit and a yukata and she was down on her knees for the work. She would touch the tiles with her fingers before using the brush, so she was likely sensing the filth there.

This floor was fairly difficult.

The floor was the big difference between Dangerous Waters and Suzu's Bath.

Here at Dangerous Waters, the floor was tiled.

At Suzu's Bath, the floor used wooden block tiles.

Dangerous Waters drained well and felt more luxurious. That was partially

because important people lived on Musashino instead of just students, but...

...It has more to do with the previous owner's tastes...or rather, their view of what a bath should be like.

Dangerous Waters had originally been owned by a representative of the Musashino Bathhouse Guild, but Suzu's parents had taken over once that person retired.

Suzu's Bath had been bought with the income from that and their pre-existing savings. It had gone out of business before, but they had remodeled and reopened it.

That difference meant Suzu's Bath had the cheaper construction.

But because it had been remodeled, Suzu's Bath had the newer equipment.

The floor was a good example.

Dangerous Waters's tiles were luxurious, but the tile block pieces were half the size of a tatami mat and difficult to remove. After all, they were heavy.

And the flowing water meant the filth would gather in the gaps between tiles.

But because the large tile blocks were difficult to remove, you had to focus on the gaps and wash the filth away with cleaner. You had to do that for all the gaps and then rinse it with water once the cleaner got the filth off.

At Suzu's Bath, the longish wooden floor blocks could be leaned up against the wall, allowing you to clean the entire structure. And if that was too much work, you could let them float in the tub overnight while the white algae creatures dealt with it.

Being able to go to that effort in keeping the bath clean was a way of showing your power as a representative of the Bathhouse Guild. And since Suzu's parents had been given the bathhouse afterwards, that representative must have recognized their skill.

And sure enough, they had acquired Suzu's Bath just a few years later.

...It's incredible.

"Wh-what is it...Ga-chan?"

“Eh? ...Oh, I was just noticing how many incredible things you can find all around you.”

Suzu herself was pretty incredible too.

The way she was scrubbing the floor was not quite crawling, but it was similar to a push-up.

She gradually moved forward as she scrubbed. If she had been doing that daily since elementary school...

...I can see why she's so skinny and has such perfect form.

Naruze also realized something else about Suzu.

“Her balance.”

“...Eh?”

Suzu looked back as if to ask what she meant, but just then...

“Oh, Suzu-san. I'll do that part!”

Adele walked up in a yukata and lined up alongside Suzu.

She got down on her knees and tried to scrub the corner of the floor.

“Eh?”

Like a clockwork toy, she dynamically rolled sideways.

“Ow, ow, ow, ow!!”

Naruze watched as Adele sat up and quickly fixed the bottom of her yukata. She then straightened up on the bubbly floor.

“This is slippery!”

“Of course it is. Why wouldn't it be?”

Naruze's thoughts turned toward “balance” once more.

Suzu's Bath, which stayed open longer and was primarily used by students, used easily-cleaned wooden floors and those were not very slippery. But Dangerous Waters used tile floors which became quite slippery with the cleaner

on them.

Even water alone was enough to make you slip and fall here.

It was incredible how Suzu kept her knees together on that floor.

That would be a combination of her excellent senses and the balance supported by them. If she maintained her form, there was little noise in her senses and she rarely misread things. Which meant...

...How much does that synergy boost her senses?

Naruze did not really understand, but she had a feeling that ability would come in handy one day. But at the same time...

“This is so wonderfully slippery! ...Two rotations!!”

“Stop skating and scrub the floor, Kimi!”

Asama’s group seemed to be enjoying themselves while cleaning the center of the floor.

After performing a turn near the wall, Kimi flipped the bottom of her longish yukata around and raised her right leg like a tail. In that scorpion pose, she reached a hand over her shoulder and took what she had grabbed with her right foot.

“Heh heh. Silly Asama, look at this!”

The idiot sister slowly slid over to Asama and Mitotsudaira and showed Asama what she had stepped on.

“A banana peel!”

“You’re getting the floor dirty!!”

“I can’t help it since I was running the cosplay teahouse without any food. You left me all alone when you rushed off to the theatre ship! Or what? Are you going to give me something to eat? Asama, are you letting me eat your boobs!? Or Mitotsudaira, are you letting me eat your, um, uhh...give me a second...your hair? ...No, that wouldn’t work. That much fiber would make tomorrow morning a real challenge...”

“What are you even talking about!?”

“Now, now.” The lunatic grabbed another banana peel from her other foot. “I knew you two couldn’t come back, so I swiped two extra bananas from the kitchen before coming here. ...See, I placed one between my boobs like this, wrapped my fingers around the other, and ate them by carefully applying pressure with my lips... Do you know what I felt like while doing that!?”

“Like a monkey.”

“Silly Asama! Why are all of your thoughts so un-lewd!? I was eating bananas! So of course I felt like a neurotic monkey!”

What in the world is she talking about? Is “a neurotic monkey” supposed to sound like “an erotic monkey”?

But Naruze saw motion to her side.

The golden wings working on the tub next to her were gesturing her way.

It was Margot. Naruze turned that way and saw a small Magie Figur hidden in her hand.

“Asama-chi,” it said.

“Eh?”

Naruze turned around and quickly saw what that meant.

Asama was scrubbing the floor while scolding Kimi. She likely did the exact same thing when scrubbing the shrine’s floor. She was down on her knees in a familiar pose for the work.



But this tile floor was different from the shrine's floors.

While scrubbing and moving along the slippery floor, she had spread her knees to avoid slipping, so the bottom of her yukata had ridden up and gathered at her waist.

"Oh, honestly."

Asama scolded Kimi and continued scrubbing the floor like that, so Adele blushed when she looked her way.

"Asama-san."

"Yes?"

"...You are far too defenseless."

Naruze had to agree. Of course, in Asama's case, her overly helpful nature and defenselessness would really only show themselves when she was around familiar people like this.

She normally seemed much more businesslike and Naruze had thought that was her natural state, but...

"Does it mean you trust us if you can be this defenseless around us?"

"Eh? Wh-what do you mean...?"

Naruze had no intention of answering that, but she did make a quick sketch for reference.

But Mitotsudaira...

"Tomo...hey, your yukata!"

She had apparently noticed.

Too late. I've finished my sketch, so do as you wish.

Mitotsudaira grabbed the butt end of Asama's yukata and she spoke to the shrine maiden with a sigh.

"You really shouldn't be showing that off to everyone."

When she pulled down, her Loup-Garou claws must have caught on it because the bottom of the yukata suddenly tore.

The downwards tug pulled Asama's butt down on to the cold floor.

"Kyaaaaaaaaaah!?"

A very loud scream echoed off the walls.

"Kyaaaah! Tenzou-kun touched my butt!"

A fairly loud scream echoed off the walls.

The wood-floored room had a kitchen behind a counter.

"Aoi-kun, I'm glad you're using the extra ingredients to serve us now that we've cleaned up the classroom, but you don't have to take the girls' place."

"What's the matter, Neshinbara!? You don't like girls!?"

A nudist wearing a blonde playgirl outfit smiled while carrying two trays loaded with food.

He spoke to Tenzou whose upper body was collapsed on the table.

"C'mon, cheer up, Tenzou. You have training tomorrow, don't you?"

"..."

Tenzou did not reply. Neshinbara responded for him from the window seat. He and Masazumi were checking through the photos of visitors and cosplay that they had taken during the day. They sorted them into different folders depending on who to send them to.

"Crossunite-kun must not have met any busty blondes today."

"...You all really like that stuff, don't you?"

"You don't, Seijun?" asked the idiot.

"No, I don't."

Masazumi did not sound at all interested, but he still approached her.

"Then you can have this."

"What is it?"

"...You've never had pizza before?"

“This has cream on it.”

“Sometimes pizza does.”

“Does it?”

Masazumi removed a glove and took a slice with red jam on it.

She bit off just the tip.

“...Wow, this is sweet!”

Masazumi saw the idiot smile her way after beginning to serve the others.

“For a job well done,” he said.

“All I did was help carry some things around.”

When she indirectly accepted what he was saying, the crossdressing nudist held up a different plate.

“Would you prefer this fruit one?”

“This is enough. ...Oh, but do you have anything more dinner-y?”

“Hm, I’ll figure something out. Tee hee.”

Don’t shake your butt at the end like that.

At any rate, Neshinbara picked up the slice of pizza he had been given. The dessert pizza had seemingly random things piled on top and each slice appeared to be different.

Neshinbara’s had a lot of caramel sauce.

Shirojiro’s had a lot of fruit. And...

“Tenzou, everyone was kind enough to leave behind the ‘busty blonde’ slice which has two custard puddings on top, so eat up.”

Everyone had obviously avoided that one because of the calories, but this was apparently one way of being nice.

At any rate, Tenzou slowly sat up in his seat and clenched his fists with his head still hanging.

“Toori-dono. Will I...will I ever meet someone I could call my destiny?”

“Pff!” said a voice over divine transmission. “Oh, sorry, Tenzou. I shouldn’t have laughed. To apologize, I’ll draw a doujinshi with you and a busty blonde. It’s fine as long as she’s female, right?”

“Wait, what does that mean!? I’ll accept it as long as she’s human or humanoid! And why is the divine transmission connected!?”

“Asama-kun prepared a real-time connection between all of us and the classroom so everyone could keep tabs on things in here. It was a time-limited thing, but the contract must not have ended yet.”

A glance at the clock showed it was just before 5.

...Asama and the others are cleaning Mukai’s bathhouse and then discussing the Gagaku Festival, right?

Naruze sounded excited, but that probably had more to do with the approaching Gagaku Festival than reaching Rank 1.

...That must be nice.

Masazumi had only just resumed thinking about becoming a politician, but some of her classmates had already started down the path to their futures.

Of course, she no longer felt like they were *leaving her behind*.

Now she was only wondering if she could do the same thing.

That was why she was jealous.

But Naito and Naruze’s success had been the result of a duel that relied on considerable effort and skill. It would be disrespectful to envy them when she was not doing anything herself.

Asama had not relied on her family connection. She had passed the rank exams fair and square and she kept up with her daily training and life.

And Mukai helped manage the family business on a daily basis.

“—————”

Realizing she had a long way to go may have been a sign that Masazumi was not putting enough pressure on herself.

...I can't just expect my dad to help out...

In the A/V room below the Provisional Council Building, everyone was watching recordings of the new spring shows and exchanging their opinions. However, one man held a divine transmission sign frame to his ear.

“Huhhhhhh!? What did you say, Ina!? We all know you became an elementary school principal because you like kids younger than 13! So can't you give Masazumi a raise for her part-time teaching job!? What!? You don't want to because she's 16!? That rounds down to 12!”

“Nobu-tan! Nobu-tan! Calm down!”

“Shut it, Koni-tan! ...What was that, Ina!? You can manage it if she teaches the first period in the morning!? And how much would you be paying from your own pocket!? ...650 yen!?”

The man glanced around the room and saw 6 of the 7 people there shake their head.

One of them, a chubby merchant, quickly produced a sum on a sign frame abacus. When the man saw that...

“Seven hundred and thirty yeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeen! ...Surely you can pay that much. What!? You can't!? You can't!!? Is your name Can't-sensei!? Fine, then! I'll just have you fired and make Masazumi a part-time principal in your place! I swear I'll do it! Got it!? That's what I'll do! ...Heh, you should have just said that in the first place. That is acceptable.”

“Huh? Masazumi? I just received a divine transmission for you. The Musashino Elementary School wants you to know they're giving you a raise for your part-time teaching job.”

“Ah,” said Masazumi when the divine transmission from Asama arrived. “I just started the other day, but they did say I picked things up quickly. And here I thought that kind of job just doesn't pay well. ...Ha ha ha. Leave it to a grade school to teach you about grades. Pay grades, that is.”

Masazumi watched as the idiot fell over, trays and all.

“What, did you think it was that funny?”

“That was a little forced, Seijun...!”

I'm not sure what he means, but he must have liked it. At any rate...

“I wonder if I have my dad's name to thank for this. ...It's possible they forced this through, so I need to do a job worth the pay. Besides, I can't even buy books the way things are.”

“Books? How about actually eating something once in a while? You're so skinny.”

“There's no point in trying to bulk up now.”

“That is true,” said Crossunite as he straightened up. “Masazumi-dono, based on my estimation of your activity level, eating too much would not lead to muscle mass. ...Do you ever do any training?”

“No, not really.”

Her middle school years had been spent on more intellectual pursuits. And once she was on the Musashi, the surface area was nearly flat and not all that spacious, so she had not felt any real reason to exercise. So...

“Being able to live my everyday life is enough for me. Although I am interested in taking walks just for a change of pace.”

“But you always end up collapsing from hunger, don't you?”

She had to confirm what the idiot said.

“Breakfast is the real problem. When I'm looking for somewhere to eat in the mornings, I end up feeling dizzy. I avoid eating anything at night, so I must use up all my energy the evening before.”

“Fine then.” The idiot sighed. “I doubt anything we say will change how you live your life, but if you're gonna collapse, do it near the Blue Thunder.”

“Judge. They've helped me a few times already. Although I don't like depending on their kindness too much.”

“If they're willing to help, there's nothing wrong with accepting that kindness,

so don't worry."

She just about agreed with that, but she stopped herself.

She understood what the idiot was trying to say, but this was about her and the Blue Thunder. She could not follow his viewpoint and let herself be defenselessly swallowed up. But when she thought about it again...

"I'm always causing so much trouble for people..."

"Who are you comparing yourself to there, Seijun?"

The idiot asked that while walking back to the kitchen.

...Who?

When she thought about that, she ended up comparing herself to Asama, Mitotsudaira, Naito, Naruze, Adele, the other girls, and the boys.

"Everyone else is doing just fine on their own."

The idiot might seem like he could not do anything, but even he could cook like this.

She understood that this dessert pizza was not something he made on a whim. It was a test for tomorrow.

...Because the ovens we can bring into the classroom aren't very powerful and are really only meant for keeping things warm.

If they tried to make a pizza normally, it would end up underdone. So he would instead make a dessert pizza that was fine with undercooked dough.

Over the past month, she had learned all too well that he was no good at academics, but...

"Even you have your talents."

"No, I don't. Everything I have is second-hand from my mom."

"But you still think for yourself in how you use that."

She said that while taking a bite of pizza, but she received a response from an unexpected place.

"That is an interesting thing to say. ...Doing just fine *on their own*, you say?"

It was Bertoni.

Masazumi looked to the classmate who was occupying an entire table by stacking up coins and bills.

He took a sip of what smelled like tea from an insulated bamboo bottle.

“For example, my business requires customers. Even when I can supply the products and distribution myself, customers are still a necessary part of business.”

“Is this the abstract idea that people cannot live alone?”

“No, it is not. For example,” repeated Bertoni. “All the ninja things Tenzou does can be traced back to his father. Both the spells and techniques.”

And...

“Ohiroshiki can run his own restaurant because of his parents’ company.”

“What’s your point?”

Was listing your examples first how merchants constructed arguments? So...

“I’m more interested in your thesis than your introduction.”

Bertoni sighed when he heard that.

“It will be less persuasive, but fine.” He pulled a single coin towards himself and stood it up with his fingers. “Techniques, family reputation, assets, and everything else are inherited from your predecessors and history and they are made useful by making customers seek them out. Nothing can be done without that unbroken line of inheritance.”

“...That’s all abstract.”

“Then,” said Bertoni while giving her an expressionless look. “What are you trying to do *on your own*?”

“Well...”

“You are trying to receive no help and you seek nothing from anyone. If you ask me, that is much more abstract. So let me say this.” The merchant asked a

question. “If I asked you for an example of *that*, could you give me even a single one?”

“An example?” she asked back.

...What am I trying to do as myself and no one else? What am I trying to do on my own?

“Well...”

...Oh, I get it.

This had to be the merchants’ tactic with Heidi as the opening act.

They had already asked her a few questions as tests.

And now this merchant was searching for her “value as a product”.

In other words, that question was a test to see how she would answer as a politician.

Something she alone could do without relying on anyone.

It had to be a one-and-only desire and answer that would normally seem entirely abstract.

...Let’s see...

One thing did come to mind. It was a desire that assumed you were all alone. It was a hope that could not rely on anything and that *no one wanted*, but it was something that a politician could create.

That answer filled her mind.

...To rebel against the world.

Masazumi thought about it.

If asked how serious she was, she could only say she was answering the question she was asked.

But it was indeed an answer to Bertoni’s question.

The Far East was under provisional rule, so they could...

...Rebel against the world.

The provisional rule had continued for 160 years. No one would want this.

Even if she did advocate that goal, she doubted anyone would follow her.

So, she thought. *This answer clearly won't help anyone and no one wants it.*

Still, it was the perfect answer for Bertoni's question.

So she opened her mouth.

"I have no intention of answering in the form of an example."

She had to say it. There was only one answer.

Tenzou listened to Masazumi's response. She straightened up as she spoke.

"I hope to be a politician. ...I will stand with the people and speak for the nation formed by those people. So," she continued. "No matter my personal opinions, I will not do anything the nation does not wish for. Or to put it another way, if the nation does wish for it..."

If it does...

"I will act even if I have no help and no one wants it."

...Well said.

That was Tenzou's assessment of Masazumi.

By replacing the will of the people with national policy, she gave the nation a personality. That was the most recent form of political science. That was the root of the parliamentary governments that had rejected the authority of kings but also shut out the influence of the people.

The choice Masazumi was trying to make was a political act guided not by her personal opinions but by the nation's personality.

...Doing things "on your own" is the ultimate form of acting on personal opinion.

She would have failed if she had answered Shirojiro's request for an example

as a government politician.

So she had instead stated what she must do as a politician.

“If the nation wishes for it, hm?”

If the nation wished for it, she would choose to do things “on her own”. That was her idea of a politician.

That did not mean she would simply accept the people’s demands. She would consider the best form for what the nation needed and select that.

In some cases, that would place a burden on the people.

In some cases, she would choose something opposed to the will of the people in order to preserve the “nation” that protected the people.

Those were the cases she referred to when she said she would *have no help* and that *no one would want it*.

And what she said did not reject what Shirojiro was saying.

To move a nation as a politician required inheriting many things.

She was saying those lonely choices were an option even after inheriting things. Or as Shirojiro put it...

“So in some cases, your politics could make an enemy of anything and everything.”

“Again, it’s all abstract,” said Masazumi. “With the Far East under provisional rule, I doubt I will ever be in a situation that requires that kind of choice. ...But if the nation wishes for it...no, if I cannot save the nation without doing it, then I will.”

“A good answer,” said Shirojiro with a nod. He placed the raised coin on top of another like he was building a tower. “You need not remember this, but I will give you one free piece of advice. Listen, let’s say you do become a politician and are prepared to make an enemy of anything and everything.”

Everyone listened to him.

“At least one person will undoubtedly support you.”

Masazumi smiled bitterly at Bertoni's words.

"Still abstract. ...Are you talking about that pattern in human psychology where you can always find a dissenter in a group?"

"You need not remember this. It is fairly unimportant."

He moved his left arm as if to cover the tower of coins he had built. And...

...Oh?

All of a sudden, all the money on the desk was gone, both coin and paper.

It was a spell. A white fox Mouse had appeared by his neck and it had opened a money-gathering sign frame. That meant the money had been stored in an alternate-dimensional safe.

Bertoni and Heidi were always at work as merchants.

...They're the real deal.

And just as she thought that...

"Here you go, Seijun. I made it so you can bring it home with you."

The idiot left the kitchen with a large, open bento box in his left hand and both a cloth wrapper and the lid in his right hand. Four glasses were lined up inside the bento box and when she looked inside from above...

"Is this jam?"

"They're trifles."

She knew what those were.

That English dessert was made by layering leftover ingredients in a container.

"You went to the trouble of making these?"

"Well, we had extra ingredients and I could more or less guess how much that would be."

The idiot held up one of the glasses so she could see.

"From the top, they have jam, cereal, thick cream, more cereal, more jam, and then adzuki beans at the bottom. The jam at the bottom is pretty far down, so when you reach the halfway point, mix it all up before eating the rest, okay?"

...Your house has an ice room, right? Put these in the refrigerated area and they'll last long enough for you to eat one a day."

She grew curious when he put the lid on the bento box, but that may have been her childish side's interest in hidden things.

But the idiot skillfully wrapped the cloth around it.

"Here, take it with you."

"...Right. Okay."

She took it. She had no reason to refuse. But there was one thing she had to say.

"Thanks."

"Don't worry about it. ...The containers are Mitotsudaira's and the bento box is Asama's, so make sure you return them later."

"Will do."

But, well...

"You all can do pretty much anything, can't you?"

"N-no, I can't find a busty blonde girlfriend!" protested Tenzou.

Don't be so quick to say that.

...Well, I don't know if they expect anything from me, but they probably are rooting for me.

Masazumi nodded while thinking about the weight in her hand and Bertoni's earlier words.

"I guess I'll head home and study."

"Ohh, you sure are studious, Seijun."

"That's about all I have going for me. Besides..." She raised the wrapped box to eye level. "Someone who isn't studious and has no one rooting for them can never become a politician."

She glanced at the wall clock and saw it was past 5.

The classroom's divine transmission contract would have ended. The

transmissions from Asama and the others had disappeared.

...They must be busy in their own ways.

“I’ll be heading home. ...Until tomorrow, everyone.”

“Sure,” said the crossdresser as Masazumi stepped out into the hall.

It was chilly.

Once she entered the hallway, Masazumi realized it was evening.

A faint scarlet light passed through the stealth barrier to fill the sky.

There was no one else in the gently scarlet-dyed hallway.

The stillness and chilliness she found there told her just how much heat and energy had permeated the classroom.

And she found her thoughts rapidly returning to their normal shape.

Once she returned home today, her job would be to carry her father’s messages to other politicians and government offices. After that, she would study and read, but...

...Right now, all I’ve done is decide what I want to do. I haven’t actually done anything yet.

This was a time of preparations.

She would study how to be a politician and receive real-time lessons in what the world and Musashi were doing.

She doubted she would have a good grasp of the state of the world and Musashi unless she continued doing this for at least a year. A lot of events would occur during a year.

“In that case, I still have 11 months to go.”

Don’t rush this, she told herself while gripping the weight in her hand.

...Even if I make a lonely decision, at least one person will support me, hm?

That was not something worth remembering.

She knew it was just a play on words or a jinx.

But she could not help but think about it. Some of her classmates were already working in their fields and it was possible all of them were prepared to make their own lonely choices after inheriting so much. In that case...

“I may not be alone.”

She had just gotten a late start and needed a lot of preparation.

Of course, those who had gotten started ahead of her would continue to achieve results.

The Gagaku Festival was one of those.

“—————”

Masazumi gripped the weight in her hand as she thought.

...Is it disrespectful to see my future self when I look at the others who have already gotten started?

“Would it still count as studious if I went to see the Gagaku Festival?”

She decided to think up an excuse. An excuse that would convince her father.

“Okay, the tub is full again, so how about we take the first bath!?”

Adele dumped a bucket-full of bathwater over her head, turned toward the others, and made a light hop into the center of the tub. Waves and spray soon followed.

“Oh, Adele, you shouldn’t make waves,” said Naito while she sat down in the tub with her wings submerged vertically into the water.

Naruze did the same and nodded.

“That’s right. It’s filled pretty much to the top at first, so whatever overflows is lost.”

“Eh!? Oh, s-sorry. I’ll pay for what overflowed!”

Adele stood up from the center of the tub.

The waves from her jump did reach Suzu who sat on the edge, but...

“D-don’t worry. It won’t...go over the edge.”

“Oh, I get it.” Naito sighed. “You don’t displace enough water. Because of your volume...”

“Wh-what was that ‘because of your volume’ at the end supposed to mean!?”

Naito shook her head.

“Adele, you forgot the ‘...’ at the very end.”

“Y-you’re right! And that only expresses more astonishment!”

Just as Adele stood up, Naito prepared herself for the water level to lower and alter her balance.

Changes in water level would shake her submerged wings, so she had to make sure her position was not changed.

...Oh?

But it did not happen.

The water level should have lowered, but it instead rose. And it actually surpassed its expected height and overflowed into the washing area.

“Ohh?”

Naito turned around and spotted the cause of the overflowing.

That cause was the person by the tub’s entrance: Asama was soaking in the water there.

...Yeah, that size will do it...

Her overall size. Not just her breasts.

But Asama, who was unaware of Naito’s thoughts, sighed.

And Kimi entered the tub behind her.

The bathwater overflowed once more.

Naito watched as Kimi swam halfway across the tub toward her. Asama stretched out her body to relax with her back against the tub’s inner wall.

“Nn... Huh? Why are you looking at me? Did you need some divine transmission help?”

“No, um, I was just thinking about physics.”

“Huh?”

While Asama tilted her head, Naomasa finished washing herself off and entered from Naito’s side of the tub.

She first sat on the edge and soaked her legs, so Naito and Adele both viewed her silhouette.

“Boobs float, right? So that means...”

“Wait a minute,” said Adele while turning back toward Naito. “Are you saying the boobs of the well-endowed will have more of an impact than me jumping in?”

Naomasa’s amount of water overflowed as if to answer the girl’s question.

“Nh,” groaned Adele when she saw it. “How many people’s worth was that!? It must be a quadratic equation! Oh, but if you include the boobs-like ‘w’ in addition to ‘x’ and ‘y’, it would be a cubic equation! Drat!”

“Wouldn’t you use ‘z’ instead of ‘w’? And, Adele, it isn’t just their boobs displacing the water. Doesn’t the rest of their body have more volume?”

“Ho ho? You mean their butts? So that’s part of it too!?”

“Ohh, I see you’re digging in your heels, Adele. But if anything, I guess it would be the whole volume that is made up of those individual parts.”

“I see. In that case...”

Adele looked past Asama’s head.

Someone was preparing to enter the bath there: Mitotsudaira.

Adele nodded and spoke while watching her.

“Now, a question. How much will it overflow with that slender body?”

Naito thought, *I feel like this is turning into a combination of philosophy and*

math.

Wasn't this something from Greek mathematics?

...A long time ago, Archimedes was asked to find out how much of an impurity there were in a royal crown that had been made, so he came up with a method that involved submerging it in water.

The method was to submerge the original weight of pure gold and the impurity-filled crown in separate containers of water and compare how much water overflowed. Due to the relationship between volume and relative weight, the difference in overflowed water would tell you the amount of the impurity.

According to the Testament, Archimedes had come up with the idea in the bath and he had been so excited that he ran naked through the streets shouting "Eureka!", which created a lot of chaos.

For the history recreation, the people in charge had discussed the matter: "We can't exactly have him running around in the nude."

"And it would be even worse if he does it while chasing around women and children shouting 'Eureka!' "

"Then let's give him some clothes."

Since they did not want him getting cold after leaving the bath, they had allowed him to wear a coat.

In the end, Archimedes had become the world's first trench coat nudist who opened the front and chased around the women and children shouting "Eureka!" That had created a lot of chaos, so what went wrong there was a common discussion topic in ethics classes.

If you looked in a textbook now, Archimedes was clearly a pervert holding his coat open, but...

...Modern math and philosophy were built on the foundation provided by people like that.

And little had changed since.

This problem had two types of people: the well-endowed with large frames vs. the slender athletic ones.

“I think I get it,” Naito said to Adele. “On the one hand you have the busty ones whose boobs will shrink a bit from the water pressure, but on the other hand you have the slender ones who are dense enough to resist the water pressure. Now, who will displace more water? ...The answer is pretty obvious.”

“D-don’t make up your mind so soon, Naito-san! The Extra Special Duty Officer is our shining star of hope!”

“Well, I’m more like Asama-chi, so aren’t I your enemy?”

“Ehh!? You were tricking me all this time!?”

About what? she wondered, but Adele was probably having brain problems after flying through the air and rolling around so much lately. It would be best not to ask questions.

But Mitotsudaira looked up when she noticed the two girls watching her enter the bath. She started by stepping into the bath on Asama’s side.

“Wh-why are you staring at me like that, Margot and Adele?”

“Oh, um...I think your volume is a little different, Mito-tsan, so don’t worry about it.”

“What is that supposed to mean!?”

With that, Mitotsudaira slowly lowered halfway into the tub.

Just then, Asama spoke up while measuring the water level with her hand.

“What...?” She frowned. “The water level just went down.”

...Huh?

Naito questioned what Asama had said.

“Eh?” said everyone else at the same time.

Naito knew why everyone, including Mitotsudaira, exchanged a glance.

Naomasa frowned and explained.

“A volume entered the water, but the amount of water receded instead of rising?”

There was a clear gap between the top of the bathwater and the bottom of Asama's raised hand.

Next to Naito, Naruze raised her pen vertically and measured the difference from a distance.

"That's more than 5mm. ...What does it mean? Is Mitotsudaira so flat that the water went inside her chest?"

"Ga-chan, if that was how it worked, the water should have vanished as soon as Adele jumped in."

"What!? What!? Why are you talking about me again!?"

"Now, now," said Asama while waving the hand she had used to measure the water level. "Um, Mito? There isn't anything weird about your body, is there?"

"Just out of curiosity, what do you think my body is doing here?"

"Heh heh," said Kimi. "I just remembered those toys that grow to 30 times their size when you soak them in water."

"Oh, yeah. I remember those." Asama nodded with a straight face. "Toori-kun once brought a roach-shaped one to my place and subsequently lost it. The next morning, it had grown giant inside the hand-washing station and caused a panic among the visitors. He came with his mom to apologize and she hit him with a super-high dropkick."

To-chan is always up to something, isn't he?

"Right, right." Kimi nodded while sitting down in the center of the tub. "I remember that. He bought it at a festival stand."

She then turned toward Mitotsudaira.

"But, Mitotsudaira? Do your boobs grow when you soak them in water or something?"

"No. They. Do. Not!"

"Then," continued Naito while tilting her head toward Mitotsudaira. "What made the water level drop, Mito-tsan?"

"Eh? Um, that's right..."

“Heh heh. Mitotsudaira, try sinking further into the water.”

Kimi laughed quietly as she slapped the tub.

“If Adele’s theory was correct, the water level should fall.”

Mitotsudaira responded to Kimi by sighing and sinking down to her shoulders.

She could not rid herself of the feeling that she was being used as a spectacle, but that could be an honor at times.

She really did exist, so they had to be mistaken that the water level had dropped when she entered the bath.

So now that she was sinking further down...

...The water level has to rise.

It felt ticklish to have everyone’s eyes on her. Some parts of her body were lacking, but she was still fairly confident in it. So she felt no fear.

“Please watch this.”

She sat down.

Before her butt even reached the bottom, the bathwater suddenly overflowed from the tub.

“...Huh?”

Mitotsudaira saw the bathwater overflowing from the three sides of the tub that did not border the wall.

“Ohh,” said Naito and Naruze as their wings were lifted up by the force of the water.

Asama’s hand was also moved up as she measured the water level with it.

“...Eh?”

The overflowing stopped, but Mitotsudaira had yet to fully sit down in the tub.

What does this mean? she wondered with a tilt of her head.

Then she heard Naomasa's voice.

"Oh... Hey, Mito? Could you stand up real quick? That will solve the mystery."

"Eh? Oh, judge. I can do that."

If that will solve it, thought Mitotsudaira as she stood up from the water.

Then something happened.

The water level quickly lowered.

"...Huh?"

Asama heard Mitotsudaira's surprise.

She understood why the girl was so surprised. There was a nearly 1cm gap below the hand she had held out to measure the water level. However...

...What does this mean?

Could it be? she wondered just as Kimi gave a deep nod and spoke.

"I know what this is."

"You do, Kimi!?"

"Judge. ...Mitotsudaira has massive but hidden boobs, so her spiritual 'mold' as a Loup-Garou gives her the volume of the boobs she should have. ...But she is still flat in reality, so it is all for naught."

"Please don't invent weird things about my species. Even if we are created from the 'mold' of people's fears, our hopes can't actually change that mold. If we could do that, we would be the strongest species out there."

"Eh?" Suzu tilted her head. She was sweating from the steam while sitting on the edge of the bath. "But isn't fear...things people...think? S-so if someone wished for...Mitotsudaira-san's chest...wouldn't it...grow?"

"...Eh?"

Mitotsudaira thought about what Suzu had said.

“Heh heh. In other words! Get someone to massage your boobs and they’ll grow!”

“W-wait just a second! How did you reach that conclusion!?”

“Oh, dear.” Kimi narrowed her eyes toward Asama. “Doesn’t it sound plausible? As the romance of Loup-Garous?”

“My, my. Honey, why are you half in tears again? This is just the way it is. I had my body grow to be a perfect match for you. ...Yes, Loup-Garous are spiritual beings, so we can change how we grow to a certain extent. And since there is a circulation between us on a daily, hourly, and minutely basis, you could say my body is growing the way you want it. ...Yes, and I want to prey on you as much as possible, so if anything, maybe it’s less my body adapting to your desires and more my body adapting to my desires now that I know your desires. ...Oh, dear. What’s wrong? Why are you arching your back like that? You can’t escape into the bottom of the bed, you know? Hee hee. I’ll be taking plenty more, okay?”

...That does sound plausible!

Mitotsudaira’s mother’s ridiculous proportions made a lot of sense if you thought of them as the result of a synergy between both her parents’ desires.

But as she listened to the others, she recalled that her mother had apparently always been like that.

...So is the original body type what really matters?

The more she thought about it, the darker the future looked, so she decided to stop.

The next thing she knew, everyone was giving her curious looks, but she really wished they would stop. She cleared her throat, raised her eyebrows a bit, and spoke.

“Um, a-anyway, can we change subjects now!?”

“Calm down,” said Naomasa. “I think I know what this is. ...Suzu, how many

divine protections does this water have compared to the other bathhouse?”

“Eh? Um, compared to...Suzu’s Bath?”

It was Asama who responded.

“This is Musashino, so it’s closer to the European style than anything. Due to that, the Asama Shrine only supplies divine protections for sterilization, disinfection, and heating. If you want a bath with more effects, you need to have a natural one prepared at Suzu-san’s place.”

“That settles it. Kimi, can you give Mitotsudaira’s hair a squeeze?”

“Hm? Like this?”

Kimi circled behind Mitotsudaira and squeezed a roll of hair like she was embracing it.

A bunch of bathwater immediately burst from the hair.

“...Huh!?”

Asama said something while brushing up bangs wet with the scattered bathwater.

“A sponge?”

“Exactly.”

Naomasa smiled bitterly and Kimi squeezed the other rolls of hair. Even more bathwater flowed from Mitotsudaira’s hair and splashed into the tub.

Naomasa smiled a little at the sound.

“Mito’s hair has a grooming divine protection, but it’s surprisingly incompatible with Shinto divine protections. It’s to the point that Asama makes a nonhuman adjustment to the Asama Shrine’s spring for her. But the water here is closer to natural. So...”

“The water rapidly soaked into my hair, didn’t it?”

“Your species gives your hair a natural divine protection for weight reduction, so you probably didn’t feel the weight. So when you first entered the water, it

soaked into your hair and the water level lowered, but when you submerged your body, all the water in your hair pushed the water level back up. And when you stood up just now...”

“The hair that had stayed dry the first time had soaked up the water while I was sitting down.”

I see, thought Asama, while running her fingers through her own hair to see how much water it had soaked up.

...My fingers run through it just fine, so I must be imagining any effect I thought I had seen.

She searched on a sign frame and saw that she did have beauty divine protections for her hair and skin. That meant she would not harm her hair by soaking it in the bathwater. But another thought occurred to her and she looked over.

“Naito and Naruze, are you two okay?”

“Oh, they do feel a little heavy,” said Naito.

“But they’re buoyant, so it isn’t much different from Suzu’s Bath if we don’t try to move them,” said Naruze. “But we did come here a few times during elementary and middle school. ...We just got used to using Suzu’s Bath once it opened.”

Those two lived on Okutama. So did Asama. The others also tended to use Suzu’s Bath since it was conveniently located when heading home from the academy. However...

“Mito, you came here a few times in the past too, didn’t you?”

“I did, didn’t I? I don’t think my hair soaked up so much water back then.”

“Your ‘mold’ has changed.”

The Cerberus on Mitotsudaira’s head barked in response to Kimi’s voice.

And Kimi responded by continuing her explanation.

“In the past, rejection was a big part of your personality, so you could keep out even bathwater with weak divine protections. But now you’ve softened

enough that you can only keep out bathwater with strong divine protections.”

“Doesn’t that mean I’ve regressed?”

“Heh heh. It’s the same as falling in love. Those feelings are important.”

Kimi hummed cheerfully and opened a few sign frames in the bath.

She activated Turning Point.

“Kimi, is that...?”

“Judge. You could call it a boob-growth prayer for Mitotsudaira. ...C’mon, Mitotsudaira, sing the song you didn’t at the Asama Shrine before. We’re practicing here today, so get us started with that.”

That sounds nice, thought Naito as she extended her main wings back along the bottom of the tub. The water resistance was bad for the wings, but it was fine if she created the currents herself. She was submerging the wings like a knife through the water rather than parting the water.

“I want to hear you sing this time, Mito-tsan.”

“Same here,” said Naruze who stopped drawing a storyboard long enough to wipe sweat from her brow. “I want to see what you can do. We’ve mostly shown you our hand. And doing this will allow us to plan a performance that isn’t too similar to yours.”

“That is a good idea.”

Mitotsudaira took a microphone sign frame from Kimi.

When she looked up, there was none of the hesitation or dejection seen on her face the other day.

She had a song ready.

And she nodded to confirm that fact. She faced the two of them, and...

“To be honest, I think it was very helpful to hear your song. At its core, yours was a Technohexen Song with its roots in Eastern Europe. And it was a song about your lives on Musashi as Technohexen. But my song is a knight’s song that also had its roots in Europe. And it is a song about my life on Musashi as a

knight. ...Knights and Technohexen are from the same time period, so there is a good chance that some elements will be similar.”

“Yes. We plan to keep the Technohexen elements limited to our fashion, but if we’re going to be similar to anyone, it would be you. ...So let us hear it.”

“...If you insist.”

They watched as Mitotsudaira prepared to sing with the Cerberus still on her head.

Mitotsudaira heard an “oh” from Naomasa and applause from the others.

She was finally able to receive that applause. She had been unable to do that at the Asama Shrine the other day because she had not decided on the talking portion yet.

But she was glad she had heard Kimi’s Dance of Joyful Awakening there.

...That let me know how much of the words inside me I could let out.

Needing to follow Kimi’s lead felt somewhat shameful as a knight, but she was still unaccustomed to being part of a band.

Now that I have finished it up and remade it, will I be able to stand alongside her? she wondered.

“Heh heh. What’s that grin about?”

“There’s nothing wrong with grinning. I’m just tuning my mood a bit.”

Being teased did not really bother her right now. Even that simple exchange could never have happened a few years ago.

So, she thought. I may not be able to forget about that time, but I do need to set my own standards now.

And at the same time...

...It is true I haven’t begun anything new.

She had shut out who she had been and made it a thing of the past. It felt like a striking difference to her, but what did her king think?

Nothing with him seemed to have changed since that time and he was making moves on another girl.

Kimi had said she was his knight and she should relax because of that relationship, but...

“————”

I'm trapped by these thoughts, she felt.

She could not let these thoughts trap her.

Thoughts were meant to decide on a course of action and urge her to take that action, not to trap her.

Was she right to wait for her king?

She did not know the answer to that question and that was why she had to think about what to do.

The song she had prepared here contained her thoughts on a possible answer to that. In other words...

“This is a fairly formal song. It is a song of a triumphant return.”

Mitotsudaira heard some impressed voices.

Naito nodded once and gave her a thumbs up.

“Mito-tsan, if it's a knight's song, then it's gotta be that, right?”

Hearing that put her at ease.

It meant her “color” had gotten through to everyone.

And Naruze said, “A song of triumph. That sounds good. Or at the very least, it doesn't sound bad.”

“Did you have to twist that around?”

“I've always been like that. This is as straight as I get.”

Mitotsudaira could only smile when the girl said that with a smile and raised eyebrows.

Then Adele sat next to Suzu on the side of the bath. She spread her hands in front of her.

“Should we clap to the beat?”

“This really isn’t that kind of song. Also, there’s a part I still can’t decide about.”

“Can’t decide? So it isn’t just that you haven’t gotten around to it?”

“Judge.” Mitotsudaira nodded. “I can’t decide what to do about the end of the talking portion. ...I tried making a talking portion to keep the Gagaku Festival exciting, but I can’t decide on the very last part.”

It was a song of a triumphant return. So...

“I think I should praise my king in the end.”

Hearing that, Kimi placed a hand over her mouth and laughed a little.

She then twisted around to avoid the others’ gazes.

...Curse her...!

Mitotsudaira knew exactly why Kimi had laughed.

She had shown Kimi the lyrics and the talking portion she had made.

But she was singing it here, so there was no need to hold back. She would be singing it at the Gagaku festival too, so...

“Ah.” Mitotsudaira had an idea. “I’ll keep the music playing at the talking portions and you can tell me what you think.”

“Heh heh. Too many corrections and your individuality will fade away, so be careful.”

That’s true, thought Mitotsudaira.

She thought about starting the song, but...

...Umm.

She had to say something first. It was something she had thought before.

“I am going to sing a triumphant return song. After Naito and Naruze’s victory, I let Kimi see the lyrics, so she did influence it somewhat.”

She looked away from Kimi as she continued.

“So I’m thankful. ...Just a little.”

Everyone gave her a “what is that about?” look, but it was not something that could be explained in words.

These lyrics included a few of the reservations inside her. And its title was...

“Howling Below the Moon. ...Here I go.”

Chapter 11: Wolf in the Reverberation

第十一章

『反響上の狼』



それは色
それは一瞬で
それは燃え上がるもの
配点 (咆吼)

It is a color

It burns hot

In an instant

Point Allocation (Howl)

Suzu listened to the sound.

It was a flowing sound. And as it pushed in from close by, it felt like...

...A wave?

No, she thought.

She lived her life listening to sounds. And because she was so intimate with sound...

“Ah.”

Is this the wind? she wondered.

It was a lot of wind. Was it the wind washing over the Musashi at night? Was it the usual wind that blew up from below and scattered the Musashi’s virtual ocean as mist?

If so...

...Will this wind become familiar music?

Just as she wondered that, she heard something.

“———”

She heard the sound of Mitotsudaira’s inhalation.

A moment later, the wolf spoke.

“Tonight will be a moonlit night.”

Suzu heard the word “moon”.

She lived her life sensing sounds.

So she did not really know what the moon was. It was apparently in the sky, but she was not quite sure what it was since she could not sense any

temperature or sound from it. However...

“Tonight will be far too lively for dreams.”

The wolf spoke.

“So until sleep beckons.”

What would she do?

Suzu could not look to the moon. But that was why...

“The wolf shall howl at the moon while recalling past dreams.”

The wolf did not look to the moon.

She howled at it.

...In that case...

A sound arrived.

It was a voice.

“The king returns.”

The words were like a howl. They shook the air and led to further lyrics.

“To a celebration in the night.”

She spoke of a triumphant return. A parade to celebrate victory. As for the wolf...

“The fanged one is asked to take the lead.”

Yes, thought Suzu.

“With pride in her heart, she lends him strength and provides the first cry of victory.”

The knight went out ahead. Mitotsudaira had to see that as a given.

...Because she's still carrying around what happened in the past.

Almost as a form of atonement, she would take the lead and ensure no one else was harmed.

But there was a time when it was not meant as atonement.

“Praising her king is enough.”

That was when she had achieved victory and gained the right to take the lead during the triumphant return.

“The army marches below the moon.

“Their return is like a march to the moon.

“The knight is glad to serve her king.

“And she thinks back to the past.”

Wow, thought Asama while looking up at Mitotsudaira.

...This is a song about how much she loves her king!

Mitotsudaira looked back at her.

It was a sidelong glance that seemed to ask “What do you think?” But this was the talking portion. The music continued and Mitotsudaira looked straight at her and spoke.

“Do you have any thoughts?”

Asama felt like her answer would be taken the wrong way whether she said yes or no.

So instead...

“Um, what were you thinking about when you wrote these lyrics?”

Mitotsudaira’s eyebrows rose a bit. But...

“————”

She only smiled bitterly.

That had to mean “You would think that, wouldn’t you?” So Asama...

“Kimi?”

She tried to ask something of the idiot standing between her and Mitotsudaira.

...What did you say to get Mito to do this?

But her mouth did not move.

The answer was obvious.

It had to have been Kimi's song they had heard at Asama's house. It had been an ode to Kimi's everyday life.

Oh, I see, realized Asama.

If Kimi sang about how enjoyable her everyday life was, it would naturally express joy about her life with him.

That would be toxic to a knight pining for her king. However...

...Kimi probably chose that song on purpose...

I'm glad I didn't fall for it, thought Asama while smiling at Mitotsudaira.

"Th-then, um, Mito? Please continue."

"...Um, your eagerness is worrying me a little."

"What's wrong with a knight's song!? Let's hear about your triumphant return to please your king!"

"Um, uh, Tomo?" Mitotsudaira hung her head and spread her mouth horizontally. "From here on, it gets a little more personal..."

"Eh?"

As soon as Asama uttered that syllable of confusion, Kimi casually placed a finger on the sign frame while floating in the tub.

That caused a large vibration in Turning Point behind Mitotsudaira.

"Heh heh. Enough excuses! Keep going, keep going! Time for the second verse!!"

"You are the worst!"

This ultimately gave Asama what she wanted, so she decided to allow it.

Mitotsudaira gathered her resolve and sang.

She would end up singing this at the festival anyway, so she had to set aside her fear.

“The beast defied everything while all alone.”

But.

“All of a sudden, she had been protected.”

People in the know would realize what she was talking about. However...

“She was told this was her home.

“So she cried, agreed, and made a new vow.”

Yes. This song could be seen as her shame and it embarrassed her to sing it, but...

“Let us offer up everything.”

It was true she had made that decision. And...

...Yes, I can reveal this much about myself.

She had recently come to think that way.

And she doubted her king would feel any pressure when he heard it. She trusted that he had some kind of plan.

So she sang. As if shouting into the sky. As if howling.

“Oh, oh. On the march home.”

She opened her throat and sang.

“Oh, oh. Look to the moon. Oh, oh. My king and I.

“Oh, oh. Focus on this song.”

She raised her voice and thought.

“Oh, oh. Offer my regrets. Oh, oh. To the moon.

“Oh, oh. To save. Oh, oh. My heart.”

She wanted to help her king.

But she formed words for the next talking part.

“This is a dream of the present.”

It was a dream.

“A dream had by the moonlit silver wolf wrapped in a blanket.”

She felt like she was saying too much. And like she was speaking too much. And like she had chosen these words while thinking what her king would think. But...

“But after waking up a few more times.”

Even if it was a dream...

“Surely this dream will come true.”

How could she trust that she would not be a burden?

Asama sensed a slight change in Mitotsudaira’s song.

...Is she making a plea?

No. These words were not being spoken to the outside world.

The sounds the knight used with a hand to her chest sounded like they were directed at herself.

“I once was lost and my justice wavered.

“I searched for what was right and nearly threw out my strength.”

But she was not afraid to reveal her anxieties about the future.

“Even if crushed by a great force.

“Even if I spill tears in helplessness.”

Asama knew that Mitotsudaira had great power as a Loup-Garou, but she was not the “strongest”.

She knew the girl had been “crushed” once about 7 years before. It had left her abandoned and she had gone wild afterwards, but something had saved her a few years later.

“I am not abandoned as a knight.”

Someone had not forgotten that she was a knight.

And that person had brought her back to them. So...

“Oh, oh. I swear my heart. Oh, oh. To the moon.

“Oh, oh. That I will not fear. Oh, oh. Making mistakes.”

The wolf howled.

“Oh, oh. Never hesitating. Oh, oh. And never straying.

“Oh, oh. Is my pride. Oh, oh. As my king’s knight.”

What did she want from that person?

The knight sang.

“I am directly relied upon.”

She wanted to be relied on and not abandoned.

Asama felt like Mitotsudaira was revealing far too much of herself. What would he think when he heard it? But...

“I dream in the moonlight.”

The wolf spoke within the knight’s song that asked for her king.

“Will it come true after I toss and turn a few more times?”

But...

“But I am happy enough already.

“So I fall asleep and I dream.”

You idiot, thought Asama in her heart.

If you can sing this much, how can you let yourself be satisfied here?

If she had enough already, she would not have written a song like this. She clearly had the thoughts inside her and they were even leaking out, so how could she act so understanding and suppress them?

It carried the same scheming weight as only showing your anger in advance and then waiting for them to invite you over.

...*But...*

Asama did understand.

Mitotsudaira had come here because she desired him as a knight. So there was something she had to tell him.

...She should probably tell him to shape up...

“The wolf takes the lead in her king’s return march.

“The knight looks to the moon and unleashes a howl.”

The wolf looked to the moon as a knight.

“That familiar scent of a promise

“Belongs to a home that did not let go or abandon me.”

A dream of tossing and turning.

A dream of what she actually wanted.

That might be saying too much, but...

“Approach the king with proud cheers.

“And he gives you a place for indulgence.”

Where was that?

“When praised and patted on his lap

“Your joy gets through even if you try to hide it.”

Wow, thought Asama yet again.

But that was the kind of king/knight relationship Mitotsudaira wanted. And...

“Forever his knight.”

That had to be the “relationship” she wanted even if only in a dream.

Mitotsudaira sang.

“Oh, oh. Look to the moon. Oh, oh. On the return march.

“Oh, oh. The past and the present. Oh, oh. The present and the future.”

It was a song of her king. And...

“Oh, oh. Straying is allowed. Oh, Oh. As we walk together.

“Oh, oh. A god sings. Oh, oh. Of the silver moon.”

It was a knight’s song of accompanying her king.

There was a way of making it real instead of a dream or something forced upon him.

She knew what that was.

She had recently had plenty of opportunities to work with the rest of Class Plum and she had realized that the reservations she had felt were only found inside herself. So...

“Oh, oh. Look to the. Oh, Oh. Waning moon, my king.

“Oh, oh. Together with you. Oh, oh. Look to the horizon.”

Just like Kimi’s song, the others were included in this song.^[2]

It was not difficult to imagine the looks on Asama and Kimi’s faces behind her.

“Oh, oh. Look to the. Oh, oh. Waxing moon, my king.

“Oh, oh. Together with you. Oh, oh. Forever with my king.”

There was of course a reason for including her friends’ names in the lyrics.

...We must be the same.

She had her feelings about the past, but in the present...

...We must be equal.

Together, they would say what they wanted to say and accept what they wanted to accept.

So.

So if she could do that with her king, she and her king would be equal.

Instead of pestering him from below and then waiting and instead of being reliant on him, she would face him at equal eye level, make a proper request, and make an active effort to help each other out.

Or she hoped that could happen.

So she would speak her words. And what should a knight say to her king on the march home if they were equals?

She formed the words. She breathed in, opened her mouth, faced forward, and spoke the words of the dream in which she looked to the future.

“Can I expect words of gratitude?”

Suzu smiled a little.

But not because it was funny.

She was happy.

She learned about things via sound, so she could actively listen to that song that treated the moon as something to howl at rather than looked at. She was also glad she had heard Mitotsudaira’s emotions in that song.

Suzu of course knew who Mitotsudaira’s king was.

Simply being in the same place as him was enough for Suzu, but that was why she sympathized with Mitotsudaira’s doubts.

After all, she did not hope for anything more and no feelings smoldered inside her.

But Mitotsudaira’s relationship with him was different. There was a promised future to it. But if forcing it onto him or pestering him about it would be a burden...

...That’s...incredible.

It was incredible that she was trying to be equal with him.

But, thought Suzu.

“Mitotsudaira...-san?”

“...Eh?”

Mitotsudaira was left in a bit of a daze after finishing her song, but now she turned toward Suzu.

The confusion over what she was about to be asked showed just how much of

herself she had placed in the song.

So Suzu spoke the words with straightforward earnestness.

“Don’t...worry.”

Her king had to have his own thoughts, he would surely treat her normally without thinking of it as a burden, and he would also be equal with her.

And...

“Even if you make a mistake...we will...set you straight.”

Mitotsudaira tensed a bit at that. The heat emanating from her cooled a bit, but...

...Ah.

Suzu heard an exhalation. And...

“...That’s right.”

There was a smile in Mitotsudaira’s voice.

She was facing Suzu.

“So I intend to do what I want without fear, even if there are some mistakes along the way.”

I see, thought Naomasa while listening to Mitotsudaira’s words.

She did not know Mitotsudaira all that well. They had known each other since elementary school, but the other girl was provisionally first in line to the Far East as well as a ranked knight.

Naomasa was a mere maintenance worker, so they had little in common.

However, she was familiar with Mitotsudaira’s circumstances and past and those things had moved her to emotion at times.

Even with social status and rank, people had their own personal troubles.

It would be one thing if those troubles were out-of-touch and indulgent, but...

...That’s right.

Naomasa wondered what she would do if she wanted to cast everything aside but was not allowed to.

What if she wanted to throw everything out and get a fresh start, but her past refused to let go?

...That would be...

"A real pain."

Adele must have heard her muttered words because the girl glanced over at her.

But Naomasa said no more.

There was in fact something she could not cast aside.

It was something she absolutely could not throw out.

However, it helped her in her everyday life and its existence was a source of hope.

But what if it broke beyond repair?

And what if she was forced to hold onto that broken thing?

"————"

Naomasa felt something like fear and tried to erase the feeling inside her. She told herself not to tremble in fear of her own imagination.

She was only placing herself in Mitotsudaira's shoes here.

She was different. She had not become like Mitotsudaira.

So she would be fine. However...

...That knight must have felt like this for several years.

I don't think I could stand it, thought Naomasa.

And she had another thought on top of that: *There's an idiot who took on the burden of what the wolf couldn't throw out, told her she was needed, and tried to continue on together with her.*

A toast to that idiot king, she thought before speaking.

“Suzu, can I have some sake?”

“Oh, yes... I’ll bring...some.”

Suzu stood up from the edge of the bath, wrapped a towel around her at chest height, and jogged off.

Adele watched her go and commented on it.

“She can’t normally run like that, can she?”

“Well, this is kind of like Bell-rin’s home.”

“Probably so,” agreed Naomasa before looking to Mitotsudaira who was soaking over by Asama and Kimi.

And...

“Mito,” she said. “I see you aren’t blushing.”

“I can forget about all that when I’m singing.”

“Then was that what you really think?”

Only after hearing that did the knight blush.

I don’t get her. Not that they knew each other all that well, but...

“It was a nice song. I mean, you were singing about your dream.”

So Naomasa looked up to the ceiling to take her eyes off the others as she spoke.

“It’s a real pain, but you should treat it with care.”

Masazumi walked through the evening sky.

She was on her way home.

Her home was on Murayama, the second port ship, so she usually took the direct, diagonal path from Okutama along the port bow rope passageway. While doing that now, she walked across a 5m-wide rope passageway made from gravitational control.

“———?”

The wind blew by. Or she thought it did.

From her perspective, it passed from the bottom left of the rope passageway to the upper right.

Something had drawn an arc on its way up into the sky.

...*What was that?*

It seemed too big to be a bird, but too small to be a Technohexen broom.

She looked up toward it and saw something in the starboard sky.

It was a humanoid silhouette.

Someone stood on the rope passageway connecting Tama to Okutama.

It was a name inheritor: Suzuki Magoichi.

Even at this distance, her demon horns and the rifles on her shoulders were visible in the silhouette. She held an *insha kotob* while the rifles took flight. They soared through the air like birds.

“—————”

The three giant crows raced their silhouettes through the evening sky.

The *insha kotob* she held while controlling their flight was likely flight authorization from Musashi. It would provide a map of Musashi's crowded airspace telling her where she could have her rifles fly.

In the evening, there was little traffic from Okutama where the academy was. Tama and Murayama's skies were also relatively calm since they were mostly used for diplomacy.

The nighttime activity would begin once night truly fell, but this was the gap between.

Masazumi recalled that twilight was known as a time of visiting demons.

And this was when she ran across a name inheritor. Even if it was at a distance and the girl was not looking back at her. To Magoichi, she would only be a passerby, assuming the girl even noticed her at all.

But, thought Masazumi.

...So that's a name inheritor.

She was different from Matsudaira Motonobu and his retainers in Mikawa. She was also different from the officers and faculty on the Musashi.

She was a foreign name inheritor who was not affiliated with any nation. That meant...

“She’s alone...”

There would be nations that wanted her. She was well-known for her skill with rifles.

But regardless, she was “alone” at the moment.

Only the rules of the world – the Testament – supported her.

“I see.”

Masazumi hoped she would be like that one day.

Of course, she had already failed to inherit a name. In that case...

“There’s no point in envying people who have already reached that point.”

She felt a definite weight in the cloth wrapper she held.

She gripped it tighter and shifted her gaze from the name inheritor silhouetted by the pale light of evening.

She faced forward and resumed the walk home.

Because...

“I’m not alone right now.”

Chapter 12: Bargaining Girl in the Lead

第十二章

『先行場の駆け引き娘』



一体どうして
ここは試練の場に
配点（一ヶ月でこんなに変化！）

How is this

A training ground?

Point Allocation (Such a Change in Just a Month!)

The second day of the festival continued where the first day had left off.

Those running stands were now comfortable with their roles and the guests had settled down from the rush of the first day. Overall...

“Now that everyone is taking their time to look around, we really need to keep customers coming in and out as quickly as possible. Today we’ll be going with soldiers, shrine maidens, knights, and ninjas, okay?”

The idiot was already crossdressing as a black-haired soldier and everyone moved to their posts when he said that. However...

“Hey, Tenzou. Can you head to the 2nd schoolyard where Class 3-1’s outside group is doing their Tasty Alche-Mist thing and buy some of their candied apples?”

“Oh, that thing where they spray it with a mist and it turns gold? I hear it instead turns silver if they don’t spray enough on it, so I hope they didn’t put anything funny in it.”

While that conversation played out, some others had also left to buy supplies.

They were at the Blue Thunder on Tama’s surface area.

“Hello.”

When Asama entered along with Naito and the others, the Blue Thunder was peaceful inside.

Huh? she thought with a tilt of the head while she and Mitotsudaira saw all the customers were seated at the tables.

“Oh? Asama-sama and Mitotsudaira-sama. ...Excellent timing.”

P-01s turned toward them with an order ticket in hand.

“I thought I would make the food myself to celebrate the Spring School

Festival. Now, there are two seats open by the window, so please have a seat there.”

...This has taken a weird turn yet again.

Even as she thought that, Asama quickly put on a smile and waved her hand side to side.

“No, we’re here for some supplies.”

“Judge, is that so? I thought you might try some of my experimental food.”

Was Asama only imagining that the other customers further hung their heads at that?

But P-01s walked back to the kitchen.

And two voices could be heard within:

“Manager, Asama-sama is jiggling her boobs, but Mitotsudaira-sama cannot do the same. What should I do?”

“Hm, that’s a tricky one...”

P-01s returned.

And she nodded deeply.

“It is apparently a tricky one.”

“That has nothing to do with supplies, does it!? Does it!?”

Asama felt like Mitotsudaira’s argument was missing the point, but maybe it was Asama who was missing the point. Regardless, she tried to correct P-01s.

“Um, could you ask the old lady if our supplies are ready?”

“Judge. I will ask.”

P-01s returned to the kitchen and the same two voices were heard again.

“...Old lady.”

“What!?”

P-01s returned while sweating.

“She refused to listen. Asama-sama, I have determined your poor word choice has created a situation that will be difficult to fix, so you should probably be careful.”

“U-umm, then could you ask the manager?”

“Judge. I will ask.”

P-01s returned to the kitchen.

“...Manager.”

“Yeah? What is it?”

The two could be heard holding a short conversation, but what they actually said could not be heard over the sound of sizzling oil.

Eventually, P-01s returned once more.

She carried a plate of some balled-up pieces of cloth. They were likely new dishtowels.

“I discussed it with the manager and...Mitotsudaira-sama. If you stuff your chest with these, you should be able to simulate the jiggling, even if it is not at Asama-sama’s level.”

“That isn’t what we wanted!”

Hearing that, P-01s looked up at the ceiling in thought. After a few seconds, she lowered her gaze once more.

“Then what do you want from me, Mitotsudaira-sama?”

“Supplies! Our supplies!”

“Judge.” The automaton nodded and held out the plate of dishtowels. “Here are your two boobs to go.”

“Umm, who stops by a café and brings back dishtowel breast pads?”

Mito gets along with her too, thought Asama while letting her mind wander. Meanwhile, P-01s gave a quick bow and returned to the kitchen.

After a while, she walked back out and held out a plate.

“Here, Mitotsudaira-sama. ...I made some chicken breasts into pad shapes.

Since you insist on the real deal, these should give you what you want.”

“Supplies! We are here for supplies!”

The wolf’s voice must have reached the kitchen because the manager poked her head out from the kitchen.

“Oh, sorry. Can you wait about 10 minutes?”

It felt like that had solved everything real quick.

Mitotsudaira seemed to go limp and Asama gave her a bitter smile. *That couldn’t have been easy*, she thought while speaking up.

“W-well, just think of it as some light warmup exercises and keep at it, Mito.”

“Indeed, Mitotsudaira-sama. We are only getting started.”

The automaton’s follow-up attack was not helping.

Asama looked over and saw the two Technohexen outside the window. The white one was holding up a Magie Figur that said “Having fun?”

...You two ran away, didn’t you!?

That was Asama’s initial reaction, but it was not inaccurate. Meanwhile, P-01s gestured them toward the window-side seats.

“Now, please wait about 10 minutes. That is just enough time for an enjoyable breakfast.”

They found a familiar face across from those empty seats. It was...

“1st Special Duty Officer Watanabe Moritsuna-san?”

Watanabe tensed up a bit at these unexpected tablemates.

She nodded at what they said, but...

...Oh.

It was the Asama Shrine Representative and the provisional Mito Lord.

The Asama Shrine Representative did not stand out much when she was wearing her school uniform, but the Mito Lord was different. That familiar face

sent a slight stir through the café.

Of course, that stir was not a light, gossipy one. It was a tense one based on her social status. The response essentially said “an important person is here”. But at the same time...

...Some of them seemed to know she comes here.

There was an atmosphere of confidence and superiority that said “I already knew that”.

That suggested this was a place those girls were familiar with. So...

“—————”

Watanabe relaxed in her seat. The aide next to her did the same.

“Don’t worry about us,” Watanabe said in a voice only the aide could hear.

“Judge,” the aide replied in the same way, so Watanabe faced forward.

She asked a question of those two girls who looked like polar opposites.

“Do you come here often?”

Watanabe saw the Asama Shrine Representative hurry a nod.

She must not have expected Watanabe to speak to her.

She had been facing the two Technohexen outside the window, so she quickly turned around.

“Eh? ...Oh, yes. I have a lot of business here, so while I don’t visit on a daily basis, I do make appearances fairly often. Yes.”

“I visit fairly frequently as well,” said the Mito Lord while further opening the cracked-open window in the Asama Shrine Representative’s stead.

The morning air entered through the window. But the cooking smells swept outside from the kitchen made their way around and in through the window.

The Weiss Hexen and Schwarz Hexen duo rested their elbows on the windowsill from outside, but they did not look at Watanabe. They were likely on the Asama Shrine Representative and Mito Lord’s “side”. And with those two’s

eyes on her, the Mito Lord looked Watanabe straight in the eye.

“I like how the Blue Thunder cooks their baguettes fairly hard, but I can’t deny my familiarity with the place has a lot to do with it.”

“Judge,” said Watanabe with a nod. Then the Asama Shrine Representative spoke up.

“What about you, Watanabe-san?”

“Judge. I’m here inspecting the records of the delivery workers’ battle from the other day.”

Without speaking a word, the Technohexen tried to slink away, but the Mito Lord smiled and grabbed the back of the white one’s collar.

“Have our Technohexen been causing you trouble?”

“No, because they dealt with it internally.”

The Schwarz Hexen grabbed the Weiss Hexen’s shoulders.

“We did it, Ga-chan! We’re innocent!”

You don’t have to say it so loudly.

But, thought Watanabe.

...These two will be the face of the delivery business from now on.

They were the face of a new era. Or at least of the generation after Watanabe’s.

The Mito Lord let go of the Weiss Hexen’s collar and the two Technohexen returned to the windowsill.

That conversation seemed to have removed some of their caution concerning Watanabe because the Weiss Hexen nodded and asked a question.

“Why is the 1st Special Duty Officer inspecting the scene personally?”

“It’s part of my patrol during the festival. And I thought I could grab some breakfast while I was at it.”

“That was a mistake.”

Something arrived just as the Weiss Hexen said that with a glare.

It was the automaton worker named P-01s. She held up an order ticket.

“Now, let me begin. I imagine you get your name called last a lot, so I will start with you, Watanabe-sama.”

Naito thought to herself while resting her elbows on the windowsill.

...I'm really curious, but I might get dragged into this if my curiosity is detected.

She focused on the presences inside the café while keeping her gaze nonchalantly directed elsewhere.

“Please tell me what you would like to eat,” said the automaton. “I will make it for you.”

This is dangerous, thought Naito. Her previous experience told her that P-01s's cooking was very experimen-...creative.

...Give an unusual answer and you could die...

Naruze wrote something on a Magie Figur next to her.

“Ordering gyudon would probably be incredible.”

Ga-chan's handwriting is so cute, but that selection is probably a little too incredible for the morning.

Watanabe picked up the menu on the table.

“I just have to order something from here, right?” she asked with a smile.

An obvious grinding of teeth and stirring of bodies came from the customers seated inside. They were definitely saying “don't do that!”

...Oh, so they're all here to enjoy the show.

Of course, if they were here as customers, there was a decent chance they would be the one on the chopping block, so were they really okay? Had their sense been numbed by experiencing such extreme stimulation on a daily basis?

But P-01s prepared her order ticket and spoke to Watanabe with a blank expression.

“Go ahead.”

“Then I’ll have the morning combo.”

“What is that?”

It was an immediate response.

Naito noticed everyone in the café had stopped moving. Even Asama and Mitotsudaira opened a single menu in front of the two of them to hide their faces from Watanabe.

Silence fell and Naruze wrote, “So what have they been serving people in the mornings?”

...Good question...

Naito concluded it may have been a collection of leftovers from the night before and then focused on Watanabe’s presence again.

The 1st Special Duty Officer cleared her throat.

“The morning combo is...”

“Yes?”

“Toast, coffee, and a fried egg.”

“Coming right uuuuuup!!”

P-01s suddenly shouted with an emotionless voice and dashed toward the kitchen.

“Is this the market?” asked Naruze with a tilt of the head, but P-01s returned precisely 15 seconds later.

And on her tray...

“Here is your morning combo.”

A brown rectangle sat on the plate.

“Since it is a combo, I made sure to combine the coffee, toast, and fried egg.”

That was exactly what it was.

And on the Magie Figur...

Silver Wolf: “Is that like French toast made with coffee?”

Mar-Ga: “No, it clearly looks like she chopped the toast into even pieces.”

Asama: “But, but! I feel like this is better than average for her!”

“Whoops.” P-01s pulled a knife from her apron like she had just thought of it.
“I forget to mention it, but since it is breakfast, there is corn soup inside.”

Gold Mar: “It’s all over...”

It was actually a refreshing ending.

But when Watanabe saw the soup with yellow lumps that came out upon cutting open the brown rectangle, she maintained her smile and gestured toward the seat by the entrance.

“Then please serve that to the person seated over there. My treat.”

Mar-Ga: “This girl knows what she’s doing!”

Asama: “Actually, I think this means the damage has finally spread to some outsiders!”

Flat Vassal: “Eh!? Is P-01s-san doing something!? I wish I could see that, assuming I wouldn’t get dragged into it myself!”

Gold Mar: “Oh, so that’s how they get repeat customers.”

Silver Wolf: “I don’t think you can call those repeat customers for the café.”

Naito saw P-01s serve the dish and return.

Her cold footsteps stopped next to Watanabe.

“Now, Watanabe-sama, please order your breakfast.”

Watanabe stared at the menu.

Asama and Mitotsudaira showed Naito and Naruze their menu. It was a breakfast menu and it contained the following items:

- **Straight-From-the-Farm Orange Juice**

- **Today's Toast**
- **Five Grain Salad**
- **Mixed Sandwich**
- **Fresh Fish & Chips**

And it went on like that. But to Naito...

...It all looks dangerous...

Why were they all qualified with stylish words like “today’s” or “mixed”? That only increased the sense of danger.

In a way, the Leftovers – Silver that Adele got in the mornings felt much safer.

But P-01s used her gravitational control to bring over a tray and served everyone glasses of water.

“Now, what will it be, Watanabe-sama?”

“Let’s see...” Watanabe thought. “You will make what I ask for?”

“I will fulfill your order as accurately as possible.”

The automaton had already proven how low the bar was set for “accurately”.

“In that case,” said Watanabe. “I’ll have the toast.”

Well done, thought Mitotsudaira, feeling impressed.

Watanabe had wanted to avoid the Blue Thunder’s dangerous-sounding official morning menu items while also not ordering anything weird. So...

...She removed the dangerous-sounding part from the menu item!

She turned the general idea on its head.

It seemed unlikely toast could turn into anything extreme.

Unlikely.

Yes, unlikely.

It probably won't happen, but maybe she should still be on her guard.

However...

“Watanabe-sama,” said P-01s. “What is that?”

“...What do you mean?”

“Let us start with the shape,” continued P-01s. “What shape is the toast you picture in your head?”

Gold Mar: “Philosophy?””

Mar-Ga: “In cooking stories, alcohol is often compared to the universe, isn't it?”

Silver Wolf: “That is just an excuse made by drinkers. Comparing it to the universe will not cure your alcoholism.”

Asama: “Wait, wait. Why is everyone looking at me?”

But Watanabe remained calm. She pointed at the rectangular English-style loaf of bread on the counter.

“Make two 2cm-thick slices of that, lightly toast them, and bring them out to me.”

“Judge. Thank you very much for the simple explanation.”

“Ohh!” some people cheered while P-01s moved back to the kitchen.

And a few seconds later...

“!?”

With a sound of impact, the Blue Thunder shook. It was a vertical shaking.

...Ohh!?

The vibration shook Naito's wings when it reached the windowsill. And after a few more seconds, P-01s returned.

“I have brought the toast as you requested, Watanabe-sama.”

The automaton held up a plate carrying two slices of toast.

The slices of bread were 2cm thick and they had been lightly toasted.

But something was wrong.

...Umm, is that...?

“Why does the toast still have the crust all around it?”

“Judge. I was told to make two 2cm-thick slices of that, so I sliced it in half and compressed the two halves down to 2cm thick. Oh, and I lightly toasted them.”

“There’s probably no point in asking, but how did you compress them?”

“Judge. ...The manager swung the heel of her palm down toward them and crushed them with the pressure of the blow.”

It was best to not wonder why she was capable of that. Because...

“This is the Blue Thunder.”

“Judge. So you understand, Naize-sama. At any rate, I have determined I have completed my mission here.”

P-01s placed the ultra-compressed toast in front of Watanabe.

Watanabe hung her head a little.

“Um.”

“What is it?”

“How did I end up losing here?”

Asama: “I think Watanabe-san would have won if she had said ‘slice that 2cm thick’ instead of ‘make it into 2cm-thick slices’ ”

Far Eastern is a frightening language, thought Naito while P-01s nodded in front of her.

“I am not sure what you mean, but this was not my victory. I successfully fulfilled your order, so I have determined this victory belongs to both of us.”

She set a glass down in front of Watanabe.

“Now, here is your water. Although since it is breakfast, it is corn soup.”

Mitotsudaira focused on drinking her water when she saw two historical firsts: toast that required a knife to eat and corn soup served in a glass.

P-01s moved on to take other orders, but they eventually heard comments from the table behind them.

“Ha ha ha. You ended up with *that!*?”

“Yeah, but you’ve got *that!*”

The demonstratives hinted at something truly dangerous.

That said, the manager must have been making sure everything was just barely edible and she would add some sauce or side dishes as needed.

P-01s was only allowed to take orders for a limited time, so it had become a sort of attraction.

...Once her ordering period is over, I think I’ll get a thick-cut bacon sandwich to go.

Or, said Mitotsudaira in her heart. With the festival going on outside, maybe I should grab a meat dish at a stand.

The entire city had smelled like food since the day before and she had had a light breakfast today. She was prepared for some snacking.

...With K.P.A. Italia so close by, there are a lot of stands serving beef cutlets and other fried meats.

I can grab a bite to eat while gathering and preparing our morning supplies and I can grab something else while transporting materials during the afternoon...heh heh heh. That sounds great...

“Mito! Mito! Why do you look so happy sitting there with your eyes closed!? Is the scene so tense that your brain started sending out some weird signals!?”

“H-how rude. I wasn’t-...”

The aroma of some meat from a nearby stand wafted in through the window.

It was apparently a type of kebab. It was somewhat strongly spiced, but that made it all the more aromatic.

“Ah...”

“Mito! Earth to Mito!”

She came back to her senses when Asama shook her, but she had been in a dangerous state there.

At any rate, she noticed Watanabe looking at her from across the table.

And the older girl had an amused smile different from her normal smile.

...*Eh?*

Mitotsudaira was somewhat confused to receive this sudden look.

“Is something the matter?”

“Judge. I just thought it was strange,” said Watanabe while P-01s handed her some jam for her compressed toast. “You’re all traveling down your own paths while also preparing yourselves.”

Watanabe thought, *What is it these kids are “gathering”?*

Authority, wealth, combat strength, academics, history, spells, and so much else would create differences between people. No matter how much you tried to deny it, people could not be made entirely uniform. How you viewed those differences could lead to inequality.

The Asama Shrine Representative.

The Mito Lord.

The face of the delivery business.

Their class also had the former crown prince.

...*Not to mention a merchant who has started to make a name for himself and Crossunite-sensei’s son...*

Normally, gathering that many “differences” would lead to something like factions or constraints. It would be entirely normal for them to cut off their interactions with one of the others to protect or strengthen their own position.

But as far as Watanabe could see, they were entirely unreserved while spending time with a vassal girl and all the others.

What did that mean?

Watanabe did not know too much about their class, but there was one thing she was certain of.

...They must have a leader.

There would be a leader that they all knew they were no match for no matter how much authority, wealth, strength, or status they had.

Someone like that had to bind them together.

That would not have happened overnight.

They had ended up like this after spending a very long time below a leader like that. They learned to not worry about the “differences” between them. Thus, these people in front of her, who had so many “differences”, were less like “high school friends” and more like sisters or very old friends.

“————”

Watanabe found herself wondering what kind of leader they had.

Was it their homeroom teacher Oriotri?

...No, she's only been their teacher in high school, so it wouldn't be her.

So she thought about the other names she knew.

...Could it be?

There was a boy who got along with Torii and always caused trouble during festivals.

He was the master of Remorse Way.

The boy who felt remorse for causing Horizon Ariadust's death 9 years ago.

Watanabe thought about that boy.

“Um.”

And she asked a question.

Asama listened as Watanabe began her question.

“Could I ask a what-if question?”

“A hypothetical?”

“Judge,” she confirmed.

...I have no real obligation to go along with what-ifs...

But this was the 1st Special Duty Officer. It was possible she was using this roundabout method as a way to exchange some kind of information.

In that case, thought Asama while noticing Mitotsudaira and the Technohexen duo looking her way. She adjusted her collar and nodded.

Words were a shrine maiden’s field.

“Let me hear it.”

Watanabe nodded. She looked to Asama while slicing dice pips into her compressed toast.

“Let’s say you have the chance to make a certain decision.”

“What kind of decision?”

Asama could not answer carelessly. This could be taken as the Asama Shrine Representative’s decision, so she pressed the upperclassman for more details. And...

“A decision where you could resolve a major incident by offering up the life of a single individual,” explained Watanabe. “Doing so would change the Far East for the better. If your class had the chance to do that, what would-...”

“We couldn’t,” immediately replied Asama.

Asama actually felt relief when she heard Watanabe’s question.

...A decision that offers someone’s life as collateral?

That was not an option.

And she did not mean that as an idealistic position or as an expression of Shinto’s teachings.

“We would not make that decision.”

“Even if it would benefit the Far East as a whole?”

“Even then, we could not use a method that presupposes a loss like that.”

Only after speaking the words did she realize how she made them sound like a foregone conclusion. She worked to make sure she never lied so she could earn substitutions as a shrine maiden, but...

...That's right.

An image of him flashed through her mind.

She felt like she was following after and protecting him.

“We could never make that decision.”

Watanabe heard the rejection and also saw it with her own eyes.

...I see.

When the Asama Shrine Representative gave her answer, it was obvious she was not just speaking for herself.

The Mito Lord and the new faces of the delivery business looked to the Asama Shrine Representative with slightly raised eyebrows.

“—————”

And they all nodded at her rejection.

So Watanabe was confident that someone supported this common understanding of theirs.

There had been no hesitation in the Asama Shrine Representative's rejection. So if she was not their leader, then they had some other leader capable of convincing her to that extent.

Was it the master of Remorse Way?

...It makes sense.

Someone important to him had been lost before his eyes, so he would naturally feel that rejection.

But, thought Watanabe.

He isn't the type to lead others.

That told her something about the blatant solidarity in that class.

...It isn't that he is actively binding them together.

The others had decided to help and protect him as their leader.

Most likely, it was so he would never feel that kind of regret again.

"I see," said Watanabe. "Your generation is bound to be a powerful one."

She took a bite of her compressed toast.

It was surprisingly well toasted and the sour flavor of the jam went well with it.

The girls in front of her clearly did not know what she was talking about, so once she finished eating, she and her aide left the Blue Thunder.

And when she stood from her seat...

"Let's make sure tomorrow's Gagaku Festival is a success."

And to do that...

"I'll need to work hard."

"Hey, sis, what happened to Asama and the others who went for the afternoon supplies?"

Kimi, who wore part of a soldier costume, turned toward her crossdressing soldier of a brother.

He must have been too busy waiting tables to hear the various divine transmission conversations.

...He really does love being a part of so much hustle and bustle.

Kimi smiled in her heart while grabbing a sign frame posted at the back of the kitchen for taking divine transmission notes. She copied one page and tossed it to her brother.

It said, "We have finished gathering supplies at the Blue Thunder. We had an interesting encounter with 1st Special Duty Officer Watanabe-san there."

“Sis, what does Asama mean by an ‘interesting encounter’? She didn’t shoot that blonde 1st Special Duty Officer with an arrow, did she?”

“The scary part is that it’s a distinct possibility...”

“Hey, the food is ready,” said Noriki while holding some plates out from the kitchen.

But it was Tenzou who took them with a “judge”. He had modified his white soldier costume to make it ninja-style and he balanced some of the plates from his hands to the inside of his elbows.

“These are all the appetizers, so I’ll get them served real quick.”

“What? You’re going to leave the main dishes to us?”

“Well, I’m not cut out for the small talk.”

“Silly ninja.” Kimi smiled while lining up some drinks on a tray. “You can always talk about yourself.”

She used her empty hand to touch herself. She started with the opened shirt at her chest and then the soldier’s helmet.

“Start by greeting them and then ask them what they think about your costume.”

“And what if they don’t say anything?”

“Then you only have to say, ‘This is the soldier hour, so make sure you do not drink too much and get arrested.’ You talk to them and, if they don’t respond, you smile and continue with the business talk. That’s an important pattern for beginners.”

“Talk to them and, if they don’t respond, smile and continue with business talk?”

“Judge.” Kimi nodded. “Do that and you can pass off your initial question as just part of the standard spiel. Let them know that and they’ll be more comfortable answering you. And then...”

“And then?”

“While taking their order and additional orders, tell them your

recommendations and what they should probably avoid. With additional orders, you can tell them what just finished cooking. Taking orders and serving them count as conversations too, so you have to treat them carefully. Also...”

Her brother arrived next to her and he touched the handmade hard point attachment parts Suzu had made.

“Also...I know. You can tell them what parts of the costume are well made and what the most annoying thing about wearing it is. Tell them things that only the people doing it would know and they’ll feel like they’re hearing something they only could have heard by coming here.”

That was true.

It was important that the customers felt they had benefited from their visit and services that accomplished that were encouraged.

But simply showing off the costume would only feel like a benefit to people interested in such things.

That was not enough. You also had to create an enjoyable atmosphere for those who had only visited out of curiosity.

...Everyone likes it when you tell them “just between you and me”.

Is that what you called a shared secret?

The festival lasted three days, but it was generally held during the day. You could not visit too many restaurants in that time. Unless you were Mitotsudaira, but she was a special case. The supply group still had not returned, so they were almost certainly checking out the outside stands. Everyone was trying to make their most of the festival time, but...

“Everyone wants to benefit by making memories in this limited time.”

“So I should go talk to them without worrying too much?”

With that, Tenzou went to go wait on the tables.

He carried himself perfectly. That was a ninja for you. As for the small talk...

“...He tripped over his words,” said Naomasa who looked a little too good in her soldier costume. “I can tell from the way he’s moving.”

Kimi had to agree.

But the ninja's amateurish reactions would also help make memories for the customers.

Kimi's brother spoke up while cleaning up some plates next to her.

"Is there anyone out there that can sympathize with the way Tenzou screws up because he tries a little too hard?"

"Everyone on Musashi is too strict about gags for that..."

And just as the siblings nodded together...

...Oh?

The hallway suddenly grew noisy. The presence at the center of the noise was approaching.

"Hey, Toori! You working hard in here?"

The line at the entrance split apart and Torii walked in.

Torii was Musashi's Chancellor and Student Council President.

Not only that, she was Kimi's "upperclassman" as a high-level Ootsubaki musician.

She got along well with Kimi's brother, but she did not hang out with him or accompany him on his path. That was another way in which Kimi saw her as a pure upperclassman.

When they met, Torii would make no distinction between Kimi and her brother.

"Ohh, Kimi! Looking sexy again today."

"My, my. What brings you here, Chancellor? But no cutting in line. Go to the back if you want to get in."

"Oh, I'm not here for that. This is part of my patrol."

Hearing that, Kimi's brother quickly held his hands over his crotch.

"Chuuko, you aren't here to arrest me again, are you!?"

“Nah, you’re always like this.”

Torii glared at him, but then smiled bitterly.

Then she looked around.

“Huh? Is Asaman not here?”

“Asama went to the Blue Thunder for supplies. ...She said the 1st Special Duty Officer was there too.”

“Oh... So Nabe was there.”

Kimi sensed something odd in Torii’s expression. If she was to sum it up in a single word...

...Trouble?

After some thought, Kimi erased the assessment in her heart.

This was not trouble. Her senses corrected her, telling her it was somewhat different. Of course, some of her senses opposed that comfort, but she left it at that since the comfort would win if she kept fighting for 7 more rounds.

It was a connection between facial expression and location.

Torii’s expression had been that of a person avoiding someone who would lecture them. Given Torii and Watanabe’s characters, that was probably a common expression when they interacted.

But...

...She isn’t here.

Why try to avoid someone who was on Tama?

That was why it was not “trouble”.

If anything, it was a look of “annoyance”.

But what was so annoying?

That group of four from the Chancellor’s Officers and Student Council had worked together when exterminating the Hidden Dragon and their band was predicted to give an encore at the Gagaku Festival.

Everything Kimi had heard around town and at school suggested they got along well. So...

...The location must mean something here.

Was there something on Tama?

It would not be the Blue Thunder. It would not be P-01s either. In that case...

“...?”

Kimi could think of a few possibilities, but there was no one to answer her question. As for Torii herself...

“Okay, I’ve gotta hurry up with my patrol, so I’ll count myself lucky that I got to see you two, Toori and Kimi.”

Torii stretched and there was likely no keeping her here.

She got along well with them, but she was not on their “side” as part of their group.

She had her own “side”. It would be one thing if they knew each other well enough to break down that boundary, but...

...I doubt she wants that.

If she did, she would be making an attempt to come to their “side”.

They must have both understood that because Torii took a step away.

“See you tomorrow at the Gagaku Festival, okay?”

“Judge. We got the final performance, so we’re going to steal the show.”

“Are you now?”

The corners of Torii’s mouth rose.

And when her eyes turned toward the line at the entrance, Kimi spoke to her.

“Chancellor?”

“Yeah? What is it, Kimi?”

“Here,” said Kimi while tossing Torii some cookies in a wrapper.

It was one of their to-go products and Kimi pointed at it with her eyes

narrowed.

“If you’re leaving, here’s something to express our thanks. ...Think of it like the dog wagging its tail for the VIP. We handmade these, so they’re special.”

“So, ‘Musashi’-san, are you not going to visit the festival?”

“Judge. Musashi as a whole is very busy given the special event. Besides, I can perceive it all with the reports from the automatons stationed across the ship. Over.”

“Musashi” replied to Sakai with a few mops and wooden buckets following behind her.

They were on Okutama’s bow deck. That open area functioned as a viewing deck and the mid-afternoon light washed over it through the stealth barrier.

That pale and warm light came from every direction and did not create distinct shadows on the floor.

Several chairs and oilpaper umbrellas were prepared for the people resting there and “Musashi” lightly bowed to Sakai below one of those umbrellas.

“Excuse me. Over.”

A few things could be heard slicing through the wind as they descended from the sky.

While Sakai took a sip of tea, the fallen objects landed in a neat row behind “Musashi”.

Mop after mop was fired into the floor.

There were 16 in all. “Musashi” waved a hand toward them to adjust her control privileges. And once they all followed her hand’s movement...

“ ‘Takao’, I will send an additional 7. Over.”

With that, she lightly waved her right hand.

Immediately, sign frames appeared over the mops behind her.

They were launch control spells using gravitational control. They focused the

Musashi's gravitational control on a single point, and...

"Securing 6 seconds of clearance on the course from Okutama's bow to Takao's starboard side. Launching. Over."

With the light sounds of objects hitting the air, the mops took flight. Their destination was Takao. The airborne mops arrived there in exactly 6 seconds.

Some of the surrounding people noticed and made impressed comments.

" 'Musashi'-sama, this is 'Takao'. I have received the supplies. Over."

"Musashi" was already doing something else by the time that report arrived.

She was serving a snack.

She pulled it out of the insulated oven on the second level of the side table she had brought along.

"Sakai-sama, would you like one of the Far Eastern pizzas which are popular on Musashino? Over."

"When did you buy that?"

" 'Akihabara' who works under 'Musashino' bought a few this morning. She delivered this one with a gravitational launch. Over."

The dish she placed on a plate was wheat dough cooked with vegetables mixed in. It looked easy to eat on the go, and...

"It is folded to keep the chuno sauce and mayonnaise inside. Over."

"I used to eat these a lot on the way back from school... Oh, I love that it has an egg inside."

"I have determined I am happy you like it. I have gathered a few other popular items, so I will serve them from every now and then. Over."

"Thanks, 'Musashi'-san. But if we're doing this, why not go take a look around?"

"Musashi" glared at Sakai.

"You always make that invitation during these events, but I can never accept because I must manage the other automatons. Over."

“Yeah, I know. But it’s so boring going around on my own.”

“Shall I call someone else who is free? Like ‘Okutama’. Over.”

“No, no.” Sakai smiled bitterly and waved his hand side to side. “The invitation was for you since you’re so busy.”

“Is that so?” responded “Musashi”. “Musashi’s population only continues to grow and the festivals grow bigger every year. I doubt I will be any less busy in the future. Over.”

She then produced an insulated bisque bottle from the side table.

“Would you like some tea? Over.”

“Did you buy that somewhere at the festival too?”

“No, this is a valuable item I do not usually use. I determined a festival would be a good time to use it. Over.”

She looked overhead as she said that.

She could see the pale light of the stealth barrier in the sky.

This was Okutama’s bow, so when she looked toward Musashino’s sky instead of straight up...

“That is the Fushimi Castle’s shadow, isn’t it? Over.”

“Will you be singing a song, ‘Musashi’-san?”

“Unfortunately, I do not have the right to participate in the Gagaku Festival. Over.”

She then opened a sign frame.

It displayed the Fushimi Castle’s status. The video footage was a little staticky because it came through the stealth barrier.

“They are currently doing their ‘supply carrying’ training, but what do you think about the mysterious phenomenon purification set to occur during tomorrow’s Gagaku Festival, Sakai-sama? Over.”

“Good question.”

“Musashi” saw Sakai look up into the sky.

“The god summoning system using the Gagaku Festival’s dances and music as festival offerings will extract and purify the mysterious phenomena. Musashi doesn’t often get to exterminate something on that level.”

“Judge. So to avoid interference and political dealings from elsewhere, it will be done where everyone can observe rather than inside the Musashi. Aki plans to send out a few student-run viewing ships, but I assume they are actually meant to observe us. Over.”

“Do you think the purification will work?”

“Judge.” “Musashi” nodded. “Based on the Fushimi Castle’s ether storage devices and past statistics from previous god summonings, I expect the ley line stagnation surrounding the Musashi will be extracted. Over.”

“But there’s a problem, isn’t there?”

“Judge.” “Musashi” nodded again. “Extracting the stagnation is possible, but it has existed around the Musashi ever since Mikawa. That is a short time, but I have determined it may have created a ‘mold’. Over.”

“Is there no way to extract that ‘mold’ and destroy it?”

“Based on past statistics, that is dependent on the Gagaku Festival. Over.”

“Musashi” opened a single sign frame.

“During the second half of the Gagaku Festival, Chancellor and Student Council President Torii-sama, who owns the Fushimi Castle, will pave the way toward the purification. She will establish the link between Musashi’s ley lines and the Fushimi Castle’s ley lines and activate the extraction. And...”

And...

“Then Asama-sama’s group will take over and control the extraction and manifestation. That will prevent Asama-sama’s group from moving, but I predict mysterious phenomena on the level of a Hidden Dragon or Non-God Sword will appear from each extractor in turn. ...Thus, the Chancellor’s Officers and the rest of the warriors will have to defeat them each in turn. Over.”

“And if they can do that, the ‘mold’ will be destroyed, huh? But if they fail?”

“Musashi” nodded at Sakai’s question.

“The Fushimi Castle will be abandoned and it will self-destruct. The extracted ley line stagnation will return to its ‘mold’ in time, but the Hidden Dragon, Non-God Sword, or whatever else will be unable to maintain themselves for long if their ‘mold’ even temporarily loses its stagnation. It is possible they will do some damage to the Musashi, but...”

She lined up a few mops alongside herself.

“I do have means of defending myself, so I have determined I can respond if necessary. Over.”

“I see. So if they fail, the most damage will be to our reputation.”

“That is a political matter, isn’t it? Over.”

“Musashi” refilled Sakai’s tea.

He nodded and glanced aft.

The academy was located there. “Musashi” looked in the same direction.

“If we fail in an operation meant to protect the Musashi, I have determined it will indicate the Far East is a nation that cannot even defend itself. The Musashi will continue its travels like normal and you will continue on like normal, but it would be a problem for some: the Chancellor’s Officers, the Student Council, the Asama Shrine, and the other name inheritors. I have determined it would damage their reputation, which is used to judge people despite having no concrete value. Over.”

And because of that...

“I would like to see a wholehearted effort from Asama-sama’s group as they manage the purification and from the Chancellor’s Officers, Student Council, vassal unit, and other warriors as they intercept the mysterious phenomena. Over.”

Chapter 13: Hoppers in Connected Rooms

第十三章

『連結部屋の望み手』



いつもいつも
次はああしようって
そう思うもの
配点（独り）

Every single time

It makes me think

I should do that next time

Point Allocation (Alone)

Night had fallen.

The residual heat of the Spring School Festival remained mainly around Okutama.

The festival would end the following day and they had the Gagaku Festival after that, but this was the last night they could spend at the festival in the name of preparations or whatever else.

They spent the night in the academy, in underground clubrooms, in hallways, or just on the schoolyard. The astronomy club and constellation inspection club saw today as their time to shine. They looked up at the sky blocked by the stealth barrier and began a planetarium presentation using sign frames and spells.

A light concert was underway by the music clubs and other volunteers.

“It’s so lively...”

All that noise reached someone inside their home.

The house with a courtyard was on the surface of Murayama, the 2nd port ship, and the person inside was Masazumi.

That was Masazumi’s home on Murayama.

...It looks like my dad won’t be coming back today, so I have to look after the place.

With that thought, she sat up in her bed.

Her father owned the house and her room bordered the courtyard.

She wore an inner suit shirt and underwear. Since spring had passed, she

wore the shirt with the sleeves removed. She had expected Musashi to be cold compared to Mikawa, but it was not.

...If anything, the underground heat warms you from below.

The boiler circulation was partially responsible, but it was mostly the heat produced by people living their lives. Asama and Naomasa had said management of underground ventilation and water quality was crucial for Musashi.

And right now, she heard the heated sounds that normally came from underground.

For today alone, the people were out on the surface even at night. It was still 9 and the curfew had yet to arrive, but no one showed any sign of heading home.

Masazumi listened to the festival sounds and guitar-playing reaching her from outside.

“———”

She stretched up to try and see them from her window.

Of course, the fence hiding the courtyard meant she could not see to the streets while up on her knees in bed.

But that disappointment reminded her of the past.

“Something like this happened at Mikawa too.”

She smiled bitterly while reminiscing about festival times at Mikawa. Her parents used to take her to festivals all the time, but she had eventually stopped going.

...I ignored them by claiming I was studying.

She had not liked the yukata she had to wear to the festivals.

It had felt wrong wearing one for a girl, but it had felt too soon to wear one for a boy. She had been too self-conscious about what people would say when they saw her wearing either one, so she had ultimately chosen not to go.

But she had definitely been interested in the festive atmosphere.

“...Yeah.”

The stealth barrier looked like a cloudy sky.

The areas illuminating that white sky from below were where people were gathered. That was just like at Mikawa. The only difference was...

...It looks like I could go without wearing a yukata.

The area where she had lived in Mikawa had had a lot of people, but it had had a very local feel to it. Life as a local was more important than life as a student, so no one had worn school uniforms to festivals.

Musashi was different. Some wore a yukata to dress up, but around half wore their uniforms. Since there was a weight tax, it could be difficult to own extra clothing like a yukata.

That meant she could visit the festival without having to worry. But...

“I’m supposed to be looking after the house.”

The problem now was her father’s strict supervision.

“Dad probably doesn’t like these festivals even if he thinks they’re a necessary part of life.”

In the festival, some people wore a yukata or dress, but others wore a costume.

Most were modeled after spirits or gods said to reside in festivals, but there were those who role-played as characters from commerce guild products and shows.

Two cypress sandwich boards bearing life-size images of characters from Military God – Noisy Girl, which had started airing that spring, walked around the festival using the tights-wearing legs extending from the bottom.

“Koni-tan! Koni-tan! There are so many character costumes on the second day this year! It’s so exciting!”

“It really is, Nobu-tan! And I can’t get enough of walking around eating candy apples, frappes, and other things that bring me back to my childhood!”

“Nhhhh! I just spotted a group of yukata girls! Now to zoom over while imagining they are Masazumi! Zoom, my legs!”

“Nobu-tan! Nobu-tan! These cypress sandwich boards really are heavy, so how can you move so smoothly!?”

What had her father thought when he brought her to those festival so long ago?

Masazumi thought about that while opening a political theory book.

She had to study. She had to bide her time. But at the same time...

“———”

...Ahh.

Maybe I really am the kind of person who likes going to festivals, she thought.

“No, wait a second.”

She had begun a new life here, so maybe she just wanted to try out a lifestyle to match. Especially since she was living like she was still back at Mikawa.

...This is my first year here, so there's so much I still don't know.

Far too often she had thought things would work just like at Mikawa only to be proven wrong. Especially when it came to interacting with other people.

She did not know Musashi's ways, so she would act based on Mikawa's ways, find herself out of sync with the others, and come to a stop.

...But...

This had to be a little different.

Her father was strict and a Provisional Councilor, so she could not head out into the city at night without permission.

And she was still only a hopeful politician, so she needed to study.

If she was going to head out and have fun, it had to be after she had done what she needed to do.

So even if it was lively and bright out there...

“It isn’t separated from me.”

She opened the window.

Even in Mikawa, she had opened the window when listening to the festival sounds and studying. Bugs would fly in and mosquitos would buzz around her, but that just meant she existed in the same space as the festivities.

This was the same.

She was not avoiding the festival. She was studying within the festive atmosphere.

But there was a difference from before. In Mikawa, she had been alone and her mother would occasionally receive festival foods from the neighbors and serve them as a meal or snack. But...

“Come to think of it...”

Masazumi got down from the bed and walked to the kitchen.

She had the trifles the idiot had given her.

Her pace picked up as she decided to eat one.

The kitchen was at the end of the hallway leading from the main building that contained her and her father’s bedrooms, the bath, and the guest room and to the secondary building that contained the entranceway and dining room. When her father and the others held a meeting in the dining room, she would make late night snacks for them there, but...

...It isn’t often we store handmade snacks in the icebox like this.

There were three sealed glasses on the refrigerated shelves of the icebox in the small kitchen.

She pulled out the closest one and found the ingredients had already started to mix together within the glass.

The night before, the cereal and cream had formed distinct layers, but no longer. The red jam had flowed through the cereal and the cream was trying to stop it.

Saying it was “ripening” was not quite right, but it did seem like it was closer

to being “ready”.

In the dimly-lit kitchen, she heard the distant festival sounds and the occasional fireworks.

The people outside would be buying food at the stands or shops and enjoying themselves in their own ways. Meanwhile...

...I’m here...

She got up and pulled a long spoon from the sink.

She stepped out onto the walkway and looked outside. She saw the festival-lit night sky beyond the courtyard. The sound and the sky connected her and the spring festival. And in her hand...

“That’s right.”

She had brought back a product from the café her class was running.

She and the festival were connected.

“That’s right.”

She repeated the words and scooped the first bite into her mouth while still looking outside.

...Nn.

Sourness suddenly permeated her mouth.

“—————”

The distinct fruity sourness was enough to wake her up.

It was strawberry.

When she bit into the white fruit flesh, the sourness arrived with the sweetness of jam.

She had guessed the cereal would be soft after the jam had soaked into it.

But while the jam would normally flow across her tongue, it now stayed in place thanks to the weight and uneven solidness of the cereal.

So the sourness was quite strong and the savoriness of the cereal soon followed.

...Wow...

She preferred Far Eastern food, and plain food at that. So when she ate something with a lot of cream or butter, she enjoyed it, but it also felt heavy. Things with a lot of sugar were the same.

But this fruity sourness really got to her.

She thought back to the first one she had eaten the night before. This flavor had lingered and overpowered even the cream and adzuki beans lower down. This second one was sure to do the same.

“Dammit...”

Had the idiot made these because he predicted this would happen?

These were trifles, makeshift sweets created by layering the ingredients leftover after making something else.

But this felt tailor-made for affecting her.

...I kind of hate that.

Maybe I should cook mom's stew and bring it with me tomorrow. No, that would be pointless.

But anyway, she thought.

“This sure is a festival.”

Even if she was at home and studying, she was still on the ship named Musashi, looking up at the same sky and enjoying the same atmosphere.

Her position was different, but she was still on the aerial city ship that was throwing a festival.

It may have been the same at Mikawa. This might have only been her feeling more comfortable with the idea of festivals now that she had reached the second year of high school and experienced the difference between Mikawa and Musashi.

Either way, she really felt like she was participating in the festival now.

...It's said festivals were used to welcome in new residents in addition to celebrating and praying.

The newcomer would greet the local god and become one of that god's people. That was its purpose. If so...

"Maybe I should ask dad if I can go to the Gagaku Festival tomorrow."

I should probably study enough for tomorrow too, she thought before thinking about some others preparing for tomorrow.

I wonder what Asama's group is doing on this festival night.

"Okay, now that we're all purified and refreshed, we need to get straight to sleep for an early morning tomorrow! Straight to sleep! C'mon, Asama and Mitotsudaira! Dive into my chest!!"

In the center of Asama's room, the idiot sister arranged the futons in a Y-shape and beckoned them over, so Mitotsudaira quietly glared back at her. The Cerberus on her head barked and she replied.

"It is true we have to show up for registration early tomorrow morning, but it's only 10."

"Heh heh. Silly girl. We'll be joining Asama for her morning purification tomorrow. You know what that means, don't you?"

Mitotsudaira thought about Asama's mornings.

...She goes to the spring at 4:30 in the morning, doesn't she?

Curious, she asked about it.

"Tomo, when do you usually go to sleep?"

"Um, between 12 and 1."

That unexpectedly inexact answer pointed to a certain fact.

"How is that enough sleep? Plus, you've been staying up even later with us sleeping over, haven't you? Let's get to sleep."

"No, no." Asama smiled bitterly and waved her hands side to side. "It isn't the

same as a compressed sleep spell, but the purification spring will purify away your weariness and whatnot. So I've been sticking to that margin lately and it works. If it gets to be a problem, I purify myself in the evening as well."

"But..."

"If you're worried about that, then you should come get in the futons, right? Come here, you two. We can fall asleep while telling old stories."

Mitotsudaira doubted those old stories would be pleasant, but if they did as Kimi suggested...

"We'll be talking for quite a while before actually going to sleep, won't we?"

"Fine, then." Asama sighed, got up, and rolled up her yukata's sleeves. "I'll prepare some food and drink we can consume just before bed."

"Oh, I'll help too," offered Mitotsudaira. "It will be warm milk and something made with soybean flour like usual, right?"

"Yes, I think we have some brown sugar syrup, so I was thinking of making soybean flour balls. We can also eat them tomorrow morning."

"Heh heh. Why not a nightcap and some summer sausage?"

With that, Kimi stood up as well. Her yukata was messed up, but she incredibly made it look like it was supposed to be simply draped over her like that.

Asama opened the sliding door to the hallway, turned around, and glared at Kimi.

"The kitchen will be cramped with three people."

"Don't worry." Kimi placed a hand on her cheek and smiled. "I'll be the taste tester."

I should have known, thought Mitotsudaira. She was half surprised and half aware that this cycle of roles had long since settled into place.

Their relationship was much like her relationship with her king. Even if they could get the job done with one of them missing, something would seem missing.

There was just one thing she could say:

“This all had a frantic beginning, but I’m glad we will make it to tomorrow with all of us here.”

“Heh heh. Not so fast. The upcoming nightcap could leave us all hungover tomorrow.”

“It will not,” insisted Asama. “I will only serve low-proof drinks.”

Is that the issue? But...

“Naito and Naruze are the same and I bet our upperclassmen are as well. ... We’re all completing our final practices and spending the rest of our night in a mixture of nerves and expectation.”

Asama nodded at Mitotsudaira’s words.

They had completed their final practice before going to bed. Including Asama’s song, they were just barely reaching 20 minutes.

Each band was given 20 minutes, but their songs had to lead into the mysterious phenomenon purification. That meant they essentially did not have a time limit. They would begin the purification after completing their final song, but...

...Will we still be judged for the quality of our songs...?

Kimi had told her to make an encore song and she had done so, but still.

“Hmm,” she groaned while stepping out into the hallway and feeling a chill at her feet.

The Asama Shrine had a barrier around it, but external sounds were allowed in and that included the distant sounds of the festival. It was past lights-out for every ship, but everyone had to be enjoying themselves.

The festive atmosphere must have been influencing the ether because the ether pathway status sign frame said it was circulating well. If that continued through the Gagaku Festival, she expected good results.

...Well, whatever the case, it’s tomorrow.

Her life was headed in a pretty bold direction here.

And she wondered something while sensing the presences and body heats of Mitotsudaira and Kimi following behind her.

When and how am I supposed to thank them? And...

“Yes, Mito, I wonder what the others are doing.”

It began with a light sound.

It was a scraping of metal.

It came from one corner of an atrium park on Tama.

Scattered trees lined the grass below the night sky. The park’s lights just barely reached that area.

Unlike the surface area, the underground park closed its gates at 10 PM. They could not close anyone inside, so the park was devoid of people trying to enjoy the festival.

But two figures moved there.

One was a girl with a metal spear in one hand.

The other was a girl with rifles hanging from her right shoulder.

They were Watanabe Moritsuna and Suzuki Magoichi.

Magoichi used one of her rifles like a sword to strike Moritsuna’s lightly raised spear.

The spear and gun slowly changed positions as if they were exchanging a greeting. The scraping of metal moved toward the tips of the weapons.

Watanabe opened her mouth.

“I was relieved you showed up.”

“I do understand what it is you are thinking.” Magoichi remained expressionless as she slowly raised her rifle. “But if you’re going to stop someone, shouldn’t it be Mototada instead of me?”

“We have the Gagaku Festival to do.”

“I see,” replied Magoichi.

The contact point of spear and gun reached the tip. The strain of scraping metal somewhat left the tips.

At the same time, a firework went off in the sky above the surface area.

It was not a large one. It was a general-use firework sold in stores. But the ball of light illuminated those two and the trees from high in the sky and the bursting sound reverberated through the atrium.

“In that case.”

They both moved.

Magoichi kept her distance.

Her rifles, Yatagarasu, were divine weapons, but their power was not easily used in this setting.

The sky was restricted on the left and right.

Even if she sent Yatagarasu into the sky, they would be obstructed by the atrium walls and they could not get the angle of fire needed.

This was purely a ground battle.

But there was a reason she had come here after being summoned.

...I understand.

The people of the desert prided themselves in never allowing a target of vengeance to escape and spending an entire lifetime hunting them down. Some even forbade themselves from returning to their clan until they had accomplished it.

To this inheritor of the name Watanabe Moritsuna, Magoichi was an enemy.

Of course, she was not her *current enemy*. She was tomorrow's enemy and the enemy after that.

Magoichi would harm something precious to her in the future, but Watanabe was attempting to stop her now.

So Magoichi would not run away from this confrontation in the present.

If one was made a target of vengeance, it was shameful to make excuses or run away.

She needed her weapons to resist. The Yatagarasu rifles were divine weapons.

She could instruct them to fire homing bullets, acceleration bullets, and scatter bullets. And all three could be fired at once.

“I cannot have them fly in such a narrow space...so it must be a ground battle. Let's go, Yatagarasu.”

She spun around one in each hand and moved her body to spin the other around her shoulder. The guns in her arms swapped places in something like a dance.

“You might be spending the night in your nest, but glare into the darkness all the same, Yatagarasu.”

She fired.

Magoichi fell back. She fired as she fell back.

Keeping your distance was the proper choice for a gunner. She was trained in techniques for fighting at close range, but it was safest to finish off the enemy from outside their range.

This was the enemy's home field. It was an away battlefield for her. However...

...There are no traps set up.

She had been summoned here, but she had not simply obeyed that. Before the curfew, she had hidden on a higher passageway and watched for any movement down below.

But there had been nothing.

With the festival and so many people, it would have been impossible to set something up before the curfew.

There had been no sign of someone's pawns trying anything during or after

the festival. The park had remained tranquil.

And once the promised time arrived, Watanabe Moritsuna had jumped down from an even higher level.

That had shown that there were no traps, but also...

...Avoiding the intermediary passageways and gates prevented anyone from seeing her.

This was a personal duel.

So Magoichi had sought battle.

She was the enemy, but she honestly liked the way Watanabe pursued this battle.

She fell back while sending out bullets.

They had been on the park's port side before. A small stream flowed down the center of the park and there were clusters of trees to port and starboard. Magoichi wanted to reach the center where she would have a clearer line of fire. However...

“————”

She looked up with just her eyes to see the sky past the three stories of the atrium.

The pale light of the night was reflected off the stealth barrier to reach the bottom of the atrium.

That light was enough to predict Yatagarasu's shots.

So she wanted to hurry into the shadows to starboard.

From there, she would be the one with a good view of Watanabe Moritsuna. But...

“I will not hold back until that happens.”

Magoichi fired on Watanabe Moritsuna who was crouching low and accelerating.

Watanabe moved forward while Magoichi fired and fell back.

Even in the darkness, she could see the movement of the enemy's rifles.

She was the 1st Special Duty Officer. She had good night vision and she had developed techniques for use against opponents armed with guns. She clearly saw the enemy bullets flying toward her. However...

...Oh?

The Yatagarasu rifles were large even for rifles. Since they were divine weapons, she had expected them to fire spell bullets.

“Physical bullets...!”

Was that because spell bullets and ether bullets could not be hidden in the darkness?

But they used spell launch systems. That introduced the possibility of trajectory changes at the moment of firing.

...So it isn't that different from an ether bullet.

A shot flew toward her face as she thought that. It was a straight shot. It gave off no killer intent, like its path just so happened to pass through where her head was.

Watanabe could tell it was meant to move her.

This attack could hit.

But if it did not, the next bullet would be fired into the end point of her evasion.

And even if she dodged that, a third one would be there to hit her. This was announcing a series of shots that left no option but to be hit. And it began with the initial shot toward her face.

The enemy was serious, but Watanabe did not mind.

“Now.”

She moved in the span of a breath.

She heard a sound from dead ahead as she dodged.

It was the two shots Magoichi had already fired after predicting Watanabe's evasion. And...

“—————”

The sixth and ninth shots followed as the triple gunshots continued.

I need to finish her off, thought Magoichi while continuing to fire.

Her enemy was a ninja. That meant mobility. She instinctually sensed she would be at a disadvantage in a lengthy battle.

So she had to finish that enemy off quickly.

Magoichi attempted to target her enemy in units of three shots.

The first shot would attempt to hold the enemy in place. And if that did not hit her...

...I fire two shots to cut off their evasion...

When firing an anticipatory attack like that, an opponent would generally take one of two actions: defend or evade.

Defense might seem like the smarter move, but the force of the hit would hold your body in place. Unless you could create a wall, that would only work against you in a duel.

But evasion was difficult too.

People could only move along the horizontal or vertical axis.

And vertical evasion was generally unthinkable. Jump up and you would be defenseless while airborne. Crouch down and your center of gravity would drop too low to make your next move.

So people would generally evade to the left or right.

They would lower their hips when they did so, so if the initial shot was targeted at their face, the next two shots should be fired to the left and right of their waist.

Then, if they dodged to the left or right, they would be shot in the chest and

blown away.

That was what Magoichi had done here.

“...!”

Except it did not work out.

According to the Testament, Watanabe Moritsuna was one of the greatest spear-users in Matsudaira’s employ. Her skill came from her light armor and metal spear, but...

...Below!?

She had chosen to evade downwards.

The second and third shots had been fired on the assumption she would dodge to the left or right, so they flew by above her crouched body.

But evading downwards would lower her center of gravity, which would weigh down her movements. If Magoichi targeted her right away, she could hit that lowered body.

Except she could not.

A moment later, Watanabe had moved elsewhere.

Her center of gravity was not lowered. And she had moved with a burst of speed.

...Is this...?

This was one of a ninja’s seemingly-impossible movements. And Magoichi knew what those were called in the Far East.

“A ninja technique!?”

Watanabe silently agreed with that assessment.

Some ninja techniques used divine spells, but hers had their foundation in pure martial arts.

She was quite particular about that. Otherwise, she would be in trouble if she ran out of divine spell charms while on a ninja infiltration mission.

So she used martial arts.

This was the same.

She knew exactly what her enemy was doing as a gunner. The series of three guiding shots was a surefire method for a skilled gunner.

It used the path of the bullets as feints and deterrents, just like you would with a spear or sword.

This opponent was a natural enemy for a close-range spear-user like Watanabe.

But she could stand up to her using ninja techniques. As the one bullet flew straight toward her face...

“—————!”

She sank down.

She angled her face down and leaned her upper body forward.

But that was all. She kept her lower body standing and unlowered.

That left her waist bent forward and her body leaning forward, but her hips and below were unchanged. Her center of gravity had not lowered. In fact, bending forward had raised her hips in the starting position for forward acceleration.

She had prepared for the perfect dash while looking like she had sunk down.

From the enemy's perspective, it would look like she had bent over and crouched down.

When targeting her face, the enemy would have to look at her face. So when her face lowered like this, it would undoubtedly be seen as her choosing to evade downwards.

But she had not.

Her hips and below were standing. She had only leaned her upper body toward the enemy.

Her only option was to make an immediate dash forward.

So she did so.

“Here I go...!”

To hide the trick of her stance control, she lowered her hips on the second step of acceleration, transforming it into a crouching charge. And after that, she launched herself to the left and right.

...To jump into the edge of her vision...!

That was not all.

Watanabe tilted her body to the side.

She rotated her forward-leaning stance so her left shoulder pointed skyward and her right shoulder pointed to the ground.

“...!”

She raced across the ground as if running up a staircase and while swapping out the heavens and earth on her left and right.

Magoichi saw more than one Watanabe.

...What is this...!?

She had immediately seen through the trick of that forward-leaning evasion.

So after the first shot toward the face, she had decided to send her next attack low instead of to the sides. However...

“She’s turning side to side at extremely low altitude...!?”

Watanabe was not running on the ground. She was tilting her body on its side and running up the ground.

It was a lot like angling your body to run up a flight of stairs. That said, her movement would begin to shift about 45 degrees off of Magoichi, but each time...

“...!”

Watanabe would lightly swing her hips and shift to the left or right.

In that moment alone, Magoichi could clearly see her.

...Kh...!!

The side to side movement was so fast it looked like there were several of her.

And that was not all. When Magoichi predicted that left and right movement and fired a bullet...

"I'm over here."

Watanabe would twist her waist and dash straight forward while leaning forward.

That brought her much closer, and...

...What will it be!?

It was the spear.

Something seemed off about the metal spear Watanabe had been holding in her right hand the whole time.

There was no trick to it. It was simply a metal spear. But it was always a part of her tactics and she kept it with her throughout all the many turns.

Why was she working so hard to keep that close-range weapon with her?

Just then, Magoichi's location worked to her advantage.

She had finally found something at her feet that would help her recover.

...I can use this.

With that thought, she fired.

Watanabe heard Magoichi fire twice.

The first was aimed at her face. The second fired diagonally down at her lowered face.

She could not allow them to hit.

So she tilted her body to the left and jumped.

It was not intuition that led her to choose left. There were three Yatagarasu

rifles, but the two that had just fired were (from Watanabe's perspective) the center and left ones in that order.

Those rifles either had a set attack range or turf because the one on the right had not once fired to her left.

So Watanabe went left.

That was exactly the center of the atrium park.

A small stream flowed from bow to stern in the center of the park and Magoichi had just jumped across it.

However, she was a little off balance and leaning. Was that because she had jumped backwards across the stream? She fired on Watanabe's left and right, but it was not an effective deterrent.

In her pursuit, Watanabe ran left along the bank of the river and prepared to cross.

"———!?"

But an attack arrived from the right.

The shot from the right was like a surprise attack.

...The Yatagarasu on the right fired outside its attack range...!?

No. It was not a bullet.

Something was sent her way just as she tried to jump over the stream on the left.

"Water...!?"

It was the stream's water.

Such a strong splash was not normal. It blasted up higher than she was tall.

...It was that second shot, wasn't it!?

The first shot had targeted her face.

But the second one had looked like it was targeting her leaning body while actually targeting the stream.

The streams flowing through Musashi's atrium parks were not natural. The

ones in the surface nature districts were one thing, but in an underground area, the inner edges were made from inner walls for maintenance purposes.

Magoichi had fired one those.

Of course, these were solid crust blocks. A diagonal shot would not break through, but the force of the hit had blasted the water up.

And that blocked Watanabe's vision.

"..."

Watanabe leaped to the left to circle around the clear barrier. She crossed to the opposite bank.

And she rolled her body to land right foot first. Then she spun her body around.

...Where is the enemy?

She saw the answer while spinning around.

Magoichi stood in the starboard shadows with her chest and below masked by darkness.

She must have used this instant to put that much distance between them. And instead of falling back even further...

"You're mine!"

She fired a shot aimed at Watanabe's clear form in the instant of landing.

The attack came from dead ahead.

Watanabe did not stop herself as she spun to face the enemy. She could take a defensive stance or dodge, but she chose neither. After all...

...I have to end this here!

After landing on her right foot, she made a quick half-rotation on that leg and planted her left foot on the ground.

And she saw the attack the enemy had fired to defeat her. A bullet was flying along the straight line connecting her and Magoichi.

There was a way to *strike back*.

There were about 8 meters between her and her enemy. Right now, she had an attack method which would cross that gap. But...

“—————”

Watanabe sensed something. She obediently accepted the warning from her intuition as 1st Special Duty Officer.

...Something isn't right.

Magoichi had used the wall of water to recover her position and she was now firing a direct attack as Watanabe landed.

That was the proper tactic for her.

But, thought Watanabe. If the first shot is toward me, where will the other two shots go?

“Wait...”

Magoichi was currently in the shadows. So...

“The other two shots are also...”

Watanabe sensed two presences in that instant.

The first was in the shadows of the starboard trees and the other was beyond the wall of water.

All three targeted her from different directions.

Magoichi sensed a chance at victory, but she did not reach for it.

She must not rush things.

She had to remain calm and control the paths of the Yatagarasu she had sent out.

Yatagarasu.

Those three rifles could fly through the air using the recoil of firing.

She could fire at whatever timing she liked right now, but the immediate sky

was too narrow. She could send them straight up, but that was meaningless as it would only vertically change the angle of fire.

So she had copied the enemy.

When jumping across the stream, she had faked losing her balance to tilt her body.

If sending them vertically was meaningless, she had to tilt herself to the side and send them horizontally.

She sent two Yatagarasu to the left or right to circle around the enemy.

She sent them beyond the shadows of the starboard trees and the wall of water.

Of course, sending the Yatagarasu horizontally was dangerous. With little initial speed, they would fall to the ground if she did not have them return quickly and sending them around the enemy left her defenseless. That was why Magoichi immediately fired on Watanabe Moritsuna and...

...Return, Yatagarasu!

The bullets were guaranteed to pierce her opponent.

The three rifles fired more than one bullet each.

“...Reach her!”

A total of 9 shots used varying heights to create a cage. She would be hit no matter where she tried to run.

But Magoichi saw something while she controlled the return of the Yatagarasu.

Watanabe Moritsuna was moving ahead of the bullets. She moved the spear in her hand.

“Ehhh...!!”

She slammed the metal spear straight down into the center of the atrium park at her feet.

...What is that?

That spear had been bothering Magoichi for a while. And it was driven into the ground at almost the exact same time as the bullets were reaching Watanabe Moritsuna.

Just as Magoichi thought she had hit, the atrium park exploded.

Magoichi saw the instant it happened.

It was the spear.

Watanabe Moritsuna's metal spear was the source of the explosion.

Of course, a metal spear did not have a warhead or anything of the sort. But if there was a technique or spell there...

...It's a twisting.

Watanabe Moritsuna's rapid side to side movement had not been done with simple turns. She had swung her body and repeatedly built up a spin.

And when spinning, she had always performed a certain action.

Instead of rotating her spear with her, she had continually built up that rotating motion.

It was most likely a spell.

As a ninja, Watanabe primarily used martial arts, so this would be her sole spell attack. A ninja's focus was on covert action and escape, but this spell would be used as a surprise attack against an enemy.

She built up her mobility in the metal spear and then released it as...

"A wide-range corkscrew-style pile bunker system!"

Watanabe smashed the air.

The blast was surrounded by a spiraling air current. But before her spear tip pierced the ground, the extended air current struck the air and the crust block itself.

The force reflected by the artificial ground spread a powerful pressure around

which swept away the Yatagarasu bullets.

“...!”

The blast expanded from a radius of 3 meters to around a dozen meters.

Some of the recoil hit Watanabe. The spell was meant to be used horizontally to smash something 30 meters away, but she had fired it at her feet. Even with a buffering spell...

...It hits you pretty hard!

If she had launched this attack forward, she might have been able to defeat Magoichi, but then she would have been hit by the bullets coming from the other two directions.

She could not afford to be shot and mutual defeat was not an option. Because...

“The Gagaku Festival is tomorrow.”

She was participating as part of Torii’s band.

Mutual defeat would not allow for that, so she made up her mind.

The explosion and twisting pressure were compressed at the bottom of the atrium before blasting skyward. In that instant, the crust block collapsed and the atrium’s inner walls shattered from the blast. Meanwhile...

“Here I go.”

Watanabe accelerated toward Magoichi.

Magoichi fell back.

She did so while pushed by the blast and kicking off of the collapsing footing.

The shattered inner walls fell from above and the ground fell away in a mosaic pattern of hills and depressions, but...

...Here she comes...!

Watanabe Moritsuna ran up all the destruction to reach Magoichi.

She was coming.

Her blonde hair bounced, bent at a horizontal right angle, and vanished.
A moment later, she could be seen in a different position while twisting.
“—————”

She disappeared and appeared again.

Unlike her previous charge, she did not move side to side very often.
Nor was she launching an attack to smash the air.

This was pure acceleration meant to finish Magoichi off with the spear.

But Magoichi only had use of the Yatagarasu on her back.

She had the other two fire as if crowing so they rose into the air and pursued her. But the explosive blast and falling rubble were in the way. At this rate, Watanabe Moritsuna’s spear would reach her before she was in range of the two rifles.

Magoichi could hear rubble.

The ground rose up below her feet, adding to her backwards momentum.
But...

...Kh...!

She was being pursued as a target of vengeance.

She was a name inheritor who had supported Honganji and made a name for herself in battles there, but she was being cornered by a Musashi name inheritor.

Who was it that had said the Far East had no fighting force – that they were toothless and incompetent?

At the very least, their officers and name inheritors were not. And...

...Mototada.

Is what you wanted from me found beyond this hidden power? If so...

“People are guided by a bird that flies even higher in the sky.”

But that was not here and now.

It was further ahead. It would come later.

In order to grasp what was there, Magoichi reached a hand back while watching Watanabe Moritsuna's approach.

She grabbed a single rifle: Yatagarasu.

She pulled it out, raised it, and directly faced her enemy.

"Whatever form it might take...give us a crow of guidance toward the future, Yatagarasu!"

She fired.

Watanabe made an attack. She used a spear, but it was a stabbing motion that pulled inward.

She moved her entire body as if launching her shoulder and arm.

She crouched down near Magoichi and used the sharp turning motion to launch her spear on the right.

She could no longer use the pressurized attack from a spell, but the spear bent and gathered force like a spring.

Instead of using a straight line, it pursued Magoichi who was falling back to the right from Watanabe's perspective.

She did not think it would hit.

She hoped it would hit. Perhaps that was just the kind of person she was.

Magoichi was attempting to draw a Yatagarasu from over her right shoulder, but it was too slow. Watanabe's spear would reach her first.

So Watanabe extended her entire body. She launched the spear so it would arrive even a moment sooner.

A moment later, she heard a sound.

It was a gunshot.

Magoichi had allowed the Yatagarasu to fire while she drew it from over her shoulder.

Of course, it was not going to hit Watanabe when fired from such an uncertain stance and with no time to aim.

But Watanabe saw the bullet had indeed hit its mark.

The physical bullet had hit...

“...Her horn!?”

...Magoichi herself.

The left horn, which extended down on the right from Watanabe’s perspective, had been hit from the outside edge.

The bullet would have had adjustments made, but her small body was still thrown to the right by her head and the horn was broken halfway down.

...She’s moved...!

She had moved away.

And Watanabe realized her own attack had not arrived.

Next, she heard three sounds.

Two of them were gunshots from the Yatagarasu pursuing from the air behind her.

“—————”

And the last was of the atrium park’s floor collapsing, the walls crumbling, and the debris burying the both of them.

Tenzou received word of Tama’s atrium park’s collapse at the same time as the alarm sounded on the ship.

His home was on Tama’s second underground floor. The 10 square meter space had a tall loft and about 3 square meters were his personal space. It was a small area, but there was plenty of storage thanks to the space above the ceiling and hanging shelves.

His plans for this night had been to install the various amateur-made games he had bought at the festival, but...

“Hm...Watanabe-sama was?”

The divine transmission to the 1st Special Duty Unit had come as a divine mail from Vice President Tadayo.

Tenzou stopped to think instead of inserting the charm bundle of installation data into the reader.

...Watanabe-sama was checking on a suspicious fire near the fireworks prepared in the starboard atrium park?

Apparently, the Student Council had been secretly preparing hundreds of fireworks to be launched from Tama's atrium park at the end of the festival the following day.

But there were still people in the city tonight and Tenzou could hear fireworks being launched in the surface area.

If the embers of those fireworks had lit a suspicious fire and that fire dropped into the fireworks prepared below...

“Did Watanabe-sama notice and rush there, but didn't arrive in time?”

The divine mail only said not to worry about Watanabe. Tadayo was an old friend of hers, so she could be trusted on that. However...

...I never heard anything about those fireworks.

“Father, did you know there were fireworks prepared in the starboard atrium park?”

He pulled up the curtain for the loft and looked down to see his father sprawled out on the ground.

He must have been experimenting with something trippy because a green liquid dripped from the corner of his smiling mouth.

Mom is really going to let him have it when she gets back, thought Tenzou.

“Umm.”

He decided to hurry out of the house and pretend he had not seen it. Just to be safe, he hid the installation charms and package below his futon and stuck the manual in his pocket.

Then he left the front entrance while only stepping on the lower tatami mats once.

“I wonder what this is about.”

When he opened the door, he found a lot of people moving through the underground wide block.

They were all either on their way up to look on from the surface or exchanging information to see if there had been any secondary damages.

“Now, then.”

Tenzou realized something once he accessed the 1st Special Duty Unit’s divine transmission network.

Watanabe had sent him a divine mail.

“What is this?”

He looked around to make sure no one was focused on him. Only then did he read through the message sent to him.

“Tsunaka, why do you do things like this? It turned out okay since I dove into the destruction and saved you, but you would’ve been in trouble if I’d failed. You should discuss these things with me.”

“But you’d have stopped me if I told you about it. And I don’t want that.”

Watanabe’s voice came from an elevated location: the roof of an apartment in the residential district of Tama’s surface area.

Its height and the nearby chimneys prevented anyone from seeing her from below.

She sat across from Tadaya, who sat cross-legged on the flat roof.

“Besides, Suzuki might be free right now, but she’s not from here. The 1st Special Duty Officer fighting an unauthorized duel will lead to diplomatic issues. Why don’t you think about these things? ...If you want to stop what Torii is trying to do, then attack Torii or me. Or...”

Tadaya moved her face toward Watanabe and pointed at the other girl’s face.

“Just don’t participate in the Gagaku Festival tomorrow.”

“You can find someone to play the keyboard instead of me. And we’ve already recorded our performance, so you could use the recording as the offering.”

“Do you have to get so selfish when I’m going soft on you because you’re injured? It’s such a pain.”

“So you know how soft you’re being, huh?”

A smile joined the dried blood on Watanabe’s face. But...

“Ah.”

Her left arm tensed and shook.

Tadayo’s gaze turned toward the large tear in the outer edge of the upper arm.

The blood had been stopped with a charm pasted on top, but Watanabe’s movement had altered the charm’s position and tugged at the wound within.

Tadayo pulled a handkerchief from her pocket and wiped away the tears in Watanabe’s eyes. She also used that dampness to wipe the blood off of her face.

“This is the last year I can clean up your messes like this, so you need to pull yourself together. Do you want to cause trouble for Oosuga?”

“Suga-kun says he doesn’t mind.”

“Does he, does he?”

Tadayo smiled bitterly and looked to the right.

There was a collapsed valley there.

The atrium park had been there.

Since it was a part of Musashi, even the atrium space had the same blocked structure as the wide blocks. So during an internal collapse, it would be purged from the adjacent blocks, but...

“That just makes the collapse all the more impressive. I can kind of see why

Oosuga is no match for you.”

“Suga-kun’s techniques are stronger than my one-shot spell.”

“The problem with you is you let your emotions dictate when you use your techniques. But...”

Tadayo looked at Watanabe again.

She was stained with dust and blood and she was injured. The worst parts were her left shoulder and...

“Your right thigh.”

“I hesitated a bit when I had to choose between an arm or a leg.” Watanabe smiled with the ends of her eyebrows lowered. “I figured I couldn’t play the keyboard if it was my arm...but I guess the leg is a problem too. And I couldn’t fully get my left shoulder out of the way either.”

“Don’t cry, Tsuna.”

“I’m not crying. Because I was prepared for whatever might happen.”

Tears spilled from her eyes as if to prove her protest wrong.

She tried to wipe off her face, but Tadayo reached out instead.

She handed Watanabe her handkerchief and Watanabe wiped off her face with it. Tadayo glared at her afterwards.

“You have blood on your lips.”

“I’d wipe the lipstick off with it.”

“You didn’t bring any with you?”

“Only a mirror.”

“Oh well then,” sighed Tadayo because she was the same.

But when she looked down, she found the alarm was gradually fading into the distance. Jurisdiction had been transferred from the guards to the Public Morals Committee’s firefighting officer and the Lifestyle Committee’s construction officer was checking on the damage.

“As the Student Council Vice President, I need to get down there before long.”

“I’ll stay here. ...Oh, and what happened to Suzuki-san?”

“I sent her flying with my spear, so she should be entirely unharmed beyond what you did to her, Tsuna.”

Watanabe frowned.

“...I’m useless.”

“No, this was our fault too. Really, I’d like to blame the world as a whole.”

Because...

“Torii has an idea and once she and Suzuki start something, it counts as a history recreation and we aren’t allowed to stop it. If we do try, the Testament Union won’t be happy with us. So I was thinking of making it as good of a show as Torii wanted. But...”

“But?”

“You refused to give up.”

“What good is that when I’m too injured to join the actual performance?” asked Watanabe. “So I will keep trying things on my own.”

“If I’d heard that this morning, I would have tried to stop you, but now I think I’ll let you.” Tadayo stood up. “I don’t know if this will fit together well enough for us all to have an easy time of it, but let’s have a parting of ways here, Tsuna. I honestly haven’t fully accepted it myself, but I have my own position to think of. ...Although there is an idiot who gives no thought to such things.”

“Tadayo-san.”

“Yes?” asked Tadayo.

“Thanks for saving me. I’m relieved to see you haven’t changed.”

“It’s who I am.”

With that, Tadayo smiled a little and jumped down from the roof. Toward the site of the collapse.

“You there! The firefighting officer and construction officer arguing over the priority of removing rubble and surveying. I know the festival is noisy, but we’ve had enough fighting already. ...I’m from the Student Council, so I will take

command here!”

Kimi viewed a divine transmission from her brother while lying on her side and holding a body pillow in the left arm below her.

The other two were asleep, but she was still awake. And the faintly-glowing sign frame displayed a report of the collapse on Tama.

The Asama Shrine had immediately been informed of the fireworks accident at a Tama atrium park. Asama had made some adjustments to Tama’s ether pathways and divine protections and her father had gone to the Provisional Council Building to learn about the situation and report on their response, but...

...The damage didn’t trigger a chain reaction, so it should be settled quickly.

As long as the surrounding areas were sealed off and infrastructure was rerouted, the site of the collapse would be no more than a pile of rubble. Gods of war and transport ships with a pallet attached to the bottom would be used to remove all that, so the divine chat showed a short complaint from Naomasa and the usual acknowledgement from Noriki.

Kimi’s brother was watching the transport ships in the sky above and the flow of people who had grown sick of the commotion.

Wise Sister: “Foolish brother? Where are you now?”

Me: “Eh? On top of Musashino’s bridge. The viewing platform has been fully opened up, so all the guys were going to gather here. But Tenzou, Noriki, and Persona-kun went to deal with all this. I called Seijun too, but I got a refusal saying that was all ‘my father this’ and ‘my curfew that’.”

Does my brother think Masazumi is a boy?

...Well, he’ll figure it out eventually.

At the very least, they had to make sure it was Masazumi herself who told him. That wasn’t something you should learn from someone else.

...Some people don’t like it when people discuss their secrets behind their back or when other people suddenly start treating them differently.

Kimi loved that kind of thing, but she could guess Masazumi was different.
So...

Me: “What about you, sis?”

Wise Sister: “What? Do you want to sleep next to me?”

Me: “When your room is empty, I really end up spinning my wheels a lot.”

Her lips loosened, but it soon grew into a bitter smile.

Wise Sister: “What do you mean ‘spinning your wheels’? Is your engine running? What gear are you in?”

Me: “Well, I keep expecting a reaction from you when I’m playing a porn game, posing on my side of the partition, or getting up early. And then I realize ‘Oh, yeah. She’s not here.’ ”

Wise Sister: “Oh, honestly. ...Then come here.”

Me: “I can’t do that.”

Because...

Me: “You’re preparing some great songs for the Gagaku Festival, right? ...I can’t let myself hear those in advance. Even if I want to hear them so bad.”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. What if I said I’d let you hear them as a shared secret?”

Me: “It’s not much of a secret if you’re singing them at the Gagaku Festival, right?”

That was a good response. So...

Wise Sister: “Would you come if we weren’t going to sing them at the Gagaku Festival or we just weren’t preparing anything?”

Me: “Yeah, then I’d cook some snacks and bring them over. You’re going to ignore lights-out until you all fall asleep, aren’t you?”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. You would have to make most of the snacks for me.”

Kimi smiled a little while thinking about the celebratory party after the Gagaku Festival.

...We'll probably spend the night here just like that.

Including the preparatory period, she had spent the entire School Festival and Gagaku Festival away from her brother.

It had been a long time since either of them had been apart for so long. They would speak late at night like this, not because she was homesick, but because they were both siblingsick.

...But it's not like we can't function without each other.

It was not about distance.

Their connection was clear even while just exchanging words.

It was fun sending these quick messages back and forth to confirm their sibling relationship.

It was not an addiction where it was painful not to do it. It was something they enjoyed doing that added a nice spice to their lives.

The “spinning wheels” her brother had mentioned would be the same.

They were the perfect partners for preserving, confirming, and establishing their way of doing things. And they had spent enough time together to feel like the other was another form of themselves.

It really was not about distance.

For the past few days, they had felt the relief of looking up at the same sky even though they were separated.

But...

“—————”

She felt like the two sleeping next to her had become aware of that relief before she had.

...That's right.

Over the past few days, she had managed to put her sibling relationship to words and she could think of various future paths and interpretations of it, but those two described it with different words.

For Asama, it was a “hopeless person”.

For Mitotsudaira, it was “my king”.

They had used those phrases countless times, but if they were to lose Kimi’s brother, they would likely realize they were “spinning their wheels” over that “hopeless person” and “my king”.

Kimi and her brother had deepened their sibling relationship to the point that they had subconsciously realized they would spin their wheels without the other, but those two had already consciously realized it.

Wise Sister: “I’m so very thankful.”

Me: “Can I ask about what?”

Wise Sister: “For Asama and Mitotsudaira.”

“Yeah,” agreed her brother, but he did not say anything more.

...You understand too, don’t you?

Since she understood, he had to as well. It was not even worth asking.

But from here on, it was the girls’ territory. They had spent so much time together over the past few days, so they had created a space with no room for her brother. So...

Wise Sister: “Foolish Brother? Will you hold my hand when I go to sleep the day after tomorrow?”

Me: “Ohh...can we do that in your bed? Mine is littered with boxes from the games I split with Tenzou.”

Wise Sister: “Fine, then. But if no one’s using it, won’t my bed get hard?”

Me: “Then I’ll air it out tomorrow and the day after that. On both sides.”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. You could always sleep in it yourself.”

Me: “Oh, like warming the sandals inside your clothes. Then tomorrow and the day after that, I’ll sleep in it and air it out. On both sides.”

Do you like both sides that much?

While continuing this silly conversation with her brother, Kimi looked to the

two girls sleeping to her left.

First, Kimi looked at Mitotsudaira who was immediately to her left.

Asama had suggested they sleep in Kimitoasamade-order for good luck, but that caused some trouble since Mitotsudaira's hair had nowhere to go.

She had placed the 5 rolls of hair on top of each other the best she could, reducing it to 2.5 rolls, and she lay on top of those. There was some concern of them tangling together, but her grooming divine protection would make them easy to separate.

...But that knight must be taking this seriously if she's willing to go this far.

Mitotsudaira knew this was the final day of preparations for the Gagaku Festival.

That may have been why she was holding the Cerberus to her chest.

She had let it sleep on her head or hair at first, but she had started holding it as she slept for the last few days.

She would not say it, but she had to be worried about the Cerberus disappearing during the mysterious phenomenon purification.

She must have grown quite attached to it.

...I wonder if she'll cry...

But you're doing a good job as her "parent".

"There will be good things too. ...I prefer for things to be fun, so that's what I believe."

After smiling toward Mitotsudaira, Kimi slowly looked past her.

On the far right of the sleeping area, Asama slept on her back.

Her arms were spread out and her chest defenseless in a way that showed she had fallen asleep without meaning to.

Hanami had floated over her head earlier. Asama had asked her to continue monitoring the Tama ether pathways, but she must have finished that because

she was gone now.

Asama herself had apparently wanted to stay awake even after leaving that job with Hanami. Over and over, she had said they needed to prepare for tomorrow, but she had not lasted. The past few days must have worn her out. The nightcap she had brought with her was still sitting next to her pillow.

...She didn't actually drink it, but it's the perfect image of a drunk.

Kimi laughed bitterly and got up.

She leaned over Mitotsudaira and reached toward Asama.

She fixed the slightly-disturbed chest of Asama's clothing and pulled the blanket back up.

"Her boobs really retain their shape even when she lies on her back."

She felt an urge to grope them, but that could trigger an aggressive defense spell, which would never end well. She had to resist. She could wake up early and do it tomorrow morning. And she wanted to do a test later to see how much her own chest kept its shape while lying on her back.

"But I should measure them real quick."

Kimi snatched a ruler from the desk and placed it between Asama's breasts to measure them. She also stuck it between Mitotsudaira's to measure her chest while she lay on her side. This really made Kimi want to write a report on their stratified society.

At any rate, she had taken the measurements. After making sure the blanket had not shifted out of place again, she returned to her spot.

She had a feeling she knew why Asama had tried so hard not to fall asleep.

Once Kimi had fallen asleep, Asama had planned to thank her.

This was the final day of preparation for the Gagaku Festival. Directly thanking each other felt too formal and distant, but she still wanted to do it.

So she must have wanted to do it after the other two had fallen asleep.

That would explain the unsure look she had occasionally had during the day.

They had known each other a long time, so when they were hesitant to say

something, it was either incredibly important or incredibly unimportant.

Which was it for Asama this time?

“Heh heh. Too bad, but I won’t let you say it.”

If she was going to say it, it had to be after they were successful.

Kimi was willing to listen after Asama had sung the encore song she had prepared for the Gagaku Festival. Because...

“This involves me. It’s meaningless if you thank me before it’s over.”

They needed to enjoy this. No matter what happened during the Gagaku Festival and the mysterious phenomenon purification and no matter the result...

“We need to see it through to the end...and enjoy it.”

With that, Kimi returned to her futon.

And she wondered if Mitotsudaira wanted to thank her the way Asama did.

Was she thankful for being given this opportunity? And...

“What about me?”

Me: “Eh? What’s that, sis?”

Wise Sister: “Nothing. Except...”

Kimi spoke to her brother.

Wise Sister: “Hidden feelings are best sought after and realized. ...Don’t you think?”

Chapter 14: Decorators in a Closed Place

第十四章

『閉め場所の飾り手達』



い、いいのかな？
合っていないんじゃないかな？
不相応なんじゃないかな？
配点（でも嬉しくて）

A-are you sure?

It doesn't look bad?

It doesn't look wrong on me?

Point Allocation (But I am Happy)

The third day of the Spring School Festival was full of countless voices even in the morning.

The main topic of discussion in that earlier period was the collapse on Tama the night before. Word spread from students who lived on Tama and various opinions and rumors spread from there.

Anyone with spare time or enjoying the festival's final day as a guest went to Tama to view the collapse site for themselves. With that trend as a common factor, the different stands and shops began disposing of their inventory shortly before midday.

They began offering discounts and selling in bulk.

Even Class 2-Plum began to run out of fresh ingredients like fruit.

"For sweets, let's shift to jam and pancakes and we need to stop buying cream after noon. Also, let's focus more on drinks. If we have extra jam and pancakes, we can bring it home afterwards."

"We can take home what's leftover!? I hope we don't get any customers at all!!"

While Toori gave his instructions and Adele gave her honest thoughts, they continued their work as a teahouse. The one remaining costume theme was "karate fighter", but there was a problem.

Asama, Mitotsudaira, Kimi, Naito, and Naruze had to prepare for the Gagaku Festival, so they would all be leaving in the early afternoon.

Adele also had to leave to prepare for the mysterious phenomenon purification and Masazumi had to leave because the Provisional Council had appointed her as a student member of Gagaku Festival security.

In other words, Class 2-Plum was short on beauty even with the crossdresser.

“Well, Tenzou will be gone too, so we won’t be able to snag as much stuff from the other class’s shops. That’s too bad, but I guess the popular places will be closing before long anyway.”

“Wh-why must you indirectly call me your gofer!? ...Eh? Kimi-dono? You want some fish & chips from Rival Rods, the boys fishing research club? Wait just 2 minutes.”

There was some discussion like that, but the lack of girls was a pressing issue.

“Sensei! Could you wear this karate fighter costume!?”

“Huh? You want me to show off my skills? But I’ll break right through the floor.”

It was immediately apparent they could not use their homeroom teacher.

In the afternoon, the only girls left with Class Plum would be Heidi and Suzu. Heidi was handling the accounting, so that meant only Suzu could wait tables. However...

“Now, then.” The idiot who was crossdressing as an alchemist for the morning’s final costume smiled at Suzu. “Bell-san, let’s figure something out, okay? ...And all you guys, change into the knight costumes we used before. Given the situation, we need to change things up a bit.”

“That’s what the idiot said, but I wonder what’s going to happen.”

Naruze turned back toward her room while swiping her finger across a Magie Figur for setting the room’s lock.

Golden wings moved near the floor at the back of the unlit room.

“Margot?”

“Oh, right. I’ll be there soon, I’ll be there soon.”

Her partner got up, put her hands on her hips, and looked around the room. She pulled a small pot from inside the larger pot on the stove and placed it in a portable insulated bag.

“Um, my guitar...”

“I’ve got it, Margot. Since we’ll be taking your broom.”

“Oh, thanks. Then let’s get going.”

Margot grabbed her broom from near the entrance and walked out. Her wings swelled out when they caught the air and she took longer steps, but that was fine. When she floated up too much, she placed a hand on the top of the doorframe and forced herself back down.

“There.”

“Please don’t float up and hurt yourself.”

“That could be tricky, but I’ll try.”

That was much appreciated.

Internally, Margot already believed they could do it, so Naruze would have to rely on that. But after they both entered the hallway and shut the door...

“I’m relying on you, Ga-chan.”

“Oh? But I’m relying on you, Margot.”

“Ah ha ha. Then we’ll be fine.”

“Yes.”

Naruze allowed herself a smile as she locked the door. Immediately, the door was fixed in place and linked to Musashi’s security divine protections.

Margot shook the door once just to be sure, but it did not budge.

“Okay, no going back now, Ga-chan. ...I wonder if Asama-chi and the others are already at the transport ship.”

“They contacted me earlier and said Mitotsudaira was ready, so probably. But...”

They began walking toward the long block with stairs that led up to the surface.

The festival was still underway. Okutama’s underground student dorm wide block was full of people retrieving things they forgot or only just now waking up

after several days of excitement. Those boys and girls spoke to the Technohexen as they passed by: “I’ll be watching on the large overhead sign frame.”

“Go do your thing without worry about being up against 3rd years.”

“Will they be broadcasting the mysterious phenomenon purification too?”

It was a little embarrassing hearing so many different voices anticipating their performance.

They did not feel like figuring out how honest they were being when they replied with “I suppose” or “we’ll do our best”.

But.

Yes, “but”. Naruze had started saying something before they began walking.

“Back to what I was saying, Margot. Are you sure you should be relying on me?”

“Yes, I’m sure.”

Margot did not hesitate to reply while she hung the insulated bag from the front of her broom. It contained the stew they would be eating before their performance. The bag also contained sliced bread, so they would not run out of fuel while singing. But Margot spoke while tying the bag’s strap on tightly.

“I always over-prepare for things, Ga-chan, but you have a way of just going with the flow. There are a lot of times I’m glad I can let you pull me along like that.”

“Really?”

Naruze could not really tell herself. So...

“To be honest, I don’t really know what about me you rely on, Ga-chan.”

It was a relief when Naito said that with a smile.

They must have been aware of each other’s strengths even though they were unaware of their own. So...

“That’s what makes us Zwei Fräulein, huh? ...Oh, but what were you doing in our room earlier? Right before we left.”

“Oh,” said Margot while pointing at the gate out of the wide block. Some pallets carrying scaffolding materials were being carried through, so she likely wanted to get through ahead of them. So Naruze sped up and Margot stayed by her side. And she whispered in Naruze’s ear.

“Just like last time, if this goes well, we’ll be exhausted and head straight to bed, right?”

“So you over-prepare for that too.”

It was not a question and Margot smiled.

“That’s how I see it going. What about you, Ga-chan?”

“Yeah, if we don’t go into it with that spirit, what’s the point, right?”

Naruze realized she might really be the “go with the flow” type. But if so...

“Will they be okay back at the classroom? I was thinking ‘they’ll figure something out’, but what about you?”

“Oh, yeah.” Margot nodded and held a passage Magie Figur up at the guard station reception. “To-chan and Bell-rin are there, so I guess they’ll figure something out.”

“Okutama” was walking around Ariadust Academy.

She was not here for fun. “Musashi” had instructed her to secure some items she needed for Sakai.

...I need to check to see if any of the Gagaku Festival participants are still in the academy.

She could determine that using their individual locations, but violating people’s privacy like that was forbidden outside of emergencies. When there was still time to spare, she could head there herself, which allowed for more experiences.

The school was structured with the 3rd years in the front building, so she would check on the 3rd years first.

...But all of the participants have already left.

Other automatons had seen them preparing in a student dorm wide block, so that would not be an issue.

The Student Council and Chancellor's Officers appeared to be out as well.

"Is Watanabe-sama absent today? Over."

Their band, Kagami, had offered all of their new songs to an Ootsubaki god, so Watanabe's portion could be played from the offering data. But while that would increase the stability of the song...

...I have determined it will decrease the appearance and image.

The right to an encore was determined by a vote from the audience, so "Okutama" suspected it would go to another band.

The school's divine network was already full of debate over which band would win the encore right. The main topic during the morning had been the collapse on Tama, but that appeared to have shifted to the Gagaku Festival during the afternoon.

...I have determined it is good that things are flowing in a calm and proper manner.

Then "Okutama" entered the rear school building.

She was here to check for Gagaku Festival participants, so she mostly ignored the 1st year classrooms.

She only carried out some small tasks left to her by other automatons.

When she came to a stop, it was in front of Class 1-Bamboo. The girl who led the 1st year Representative Committee members handed her a bundle of sign frames and spoke in the Kansai dialect.

"These are the survey results from the 1st year students. I would appreciate it if you filed them away."

"Okutama" accepted them and bowed.

That just left the 2nd years, but most of the Gagaku Festival participants were in Class 2-Plum.

She climbed the stairs to the third floor while wondering what Asama and the

Zwei Fräulein were doing.

“————?”

Class 2-Plum was to the back on the port side of the third floor.

But even though it was midafternoon and close to time for the closing ceremony, there was a line outside Class Plum’s classroom.

...What is this?

Class Plum should have been missing quite a few of its members, so what had caused this line?

Questions were a source of experiences.

So “Okutama” decided to take a peek inside Class Plum to increase her experiences.

Suzu was nervous.

...U-umm.

She sat on a chair fully decorated with flowers. The chair was positioned at the front of the cosplay teahouse, where the teacher’s desk would normally be.

On Toori’s suggestion, she wore a modification of a Weiss Hexen costume. The costume was white with frills and a bonnet, but she wore it like a dress with the collar open to keep the top of the chest exposed.

And the customer seating was arranged differently from the morning.

Before, the seats had been scattered around the room with gaps between, but now they were arranged in three sides of a square to give them all a view of her.

She felt no embarrassment at being seen. She viewed it the same as sitting at the attendant’s booth at the bathhouse and everyone here was from the academy and around her age, so that was not an issue at all.

The nerves came from elsewhere:

“Now, princess. The commoners are asking for food.”

Someone in a knight costume knelt before her.

It was Toori. It was sometimes Shirojiro (who had been convinced to do it with money), Ohiroshiki, Itoken, or one of the others, but it was generally him.

She took the list of orders he handed her because she was the “princess” served by this knight.

“...Toori-kun is...treating m-me like...a princess.

That was her “role”. The “knights” wrote out the lists while pressing down hard and abbreviating things, so she could read it by running her fingers along it.

“W-would three teas...and two...pancakes be good...for you over...there?”

She asked the three upperclassmen girls at a table in the back.

“Judge! Whatever you think is best, White Princess!”

She nodded at the response which was more amused than happy. The knight stood up before her, bowed, and held out his hand. She passed the list back to him and he bowed toward the customers with a hand to his chest.

“Okayyyy! Three teas!”

Everyone burst out laughing when he shouted into the kitchen like this was the market.

Soon, Noriki left the kitchen. He too wore a knight costume, but he carried a tray with a tea set on it.

And while “he” walked toward the kitchen...

“You’re really into this, Noriki.”

“Masazumi already said that and I don’t need it from you too. Also...this is easier because I don’t have to talk.”

It was now Suzu’s turn again.

As Noriki approached, he bowed toward her and she stood from her seat. And as a “princess” she walked to the table in question with the “knight” accompanying her. She also made sure to pull a flower from the chair and hold it in her hand.

She only had one thing to say while placing the flower on the table.

“Please...enjoy yourselves.”

He had told her to sound as cool as possible, but there were things some people simply could not do.

However, she heard a voice while Noriki wordlessly served the tea.

“Um, princess, please let us see the back of your dress!”

What is this about? she wondered while using the flower to hide the tension in her mouth. And she lightly twirled around.

“...!”

She heard cheers of “so cute” and “nice”.

...I-is that how...it works?

Showing off the costume as requested proved to be a turning point. Once everyone knew that was an option, they all started asking for the same thing.

While the “knight” was serving the food or drink, she would set down the flower she had brought from the chair and nod. Once she took a step back, the “knight” would step between her and the table and bow.

After that, the “knight” would accompany her back to her chair, but when it was “him”, he would hold her hand.

...Noriki-kun stands diagonally behind me...as if protecting me.

Ohiroshiki-kun doesn't do anything, but that's okay because everyone knows it's related to his religion.

Everyone is different, she thought while the customers applauded behind her. The applause had become a regular occurrence after the table that had first asked her to twirl around. She would smile when she returned to her seat and it delighted everyone even more when she bowed. It was the same as the bathhouse attendant's booth.

Wise Sister: “My, my. I hear you've done a good job of changing up the costumes and situation.”

Me: “We'll wear the karate fighter costumes when we go to cheer you on, so

try to spot us from the stage. Or is it not going to work like that?"

Silver Wolf: "That I couldn't tell you, but what are you like as a knight, my king?"

Wise Sister: "Heh heh. Silly girl. You mustn't confuse roleplaying with reality. And we all know it would be puppy play for you. C'mon, it's time to get in heat!"

Silver Wolf: "What are you talking about!? And I wouldn't do that kind of play!"

"Heh heh. Since you worked so hard, I'll reward you while on all fours like a wolf. Yes, don't worry. There will be a time limit and I won't go at it too greedily. Now, we might not have much time, but let's go after each other like two predators. Yes, don't worry. The time limit will be short. Since I'm a wolf... how about until the next full moon?"

Silver Wolf: "U-umm, I wouldn't! I wouldn't? Um, probably."

Asama: "Then, uh, what kind would you do?"

A few seconds passed. And...

Asama: "O-oh, I mean what kind of cosplay would you do like they're doing at the classroom. I didn't mean anything weird. So I'm safe! Shinto safe!!"

Suzu thought, *They never change, do they?*

...Asama-san is the same as always...so the Gagaku Festival should be fine.

Those three were apparently already on site. Naito and Naruze would catch up with them later, but...

"Hey, Bell-san."

"Eh? Wh-what?"

When she asked that, his face approached her and she heard a quiet voice.

"Things are coming to a close, so we'll let in two more tables' worth of customers before shutting the doors. We've been reliant on you from beginning

to end, so thanks a lot.”

“I-it isn’t over...yet.”

She gave a bitter smile, but she knew he understood that.

The closing ceremony was traditionally just a broadcast from the Student Council President, so everyone would start on the final celebration soon afterwards.

The students participating in the Gagaku Festival and their classes had priority seating, but they still had to arrive within the time limit. So...

...Once we close up...we need to hurry to...the Fushimi Castle.

“Then,” said Suzu. “Toori-kun...will you be the ‘knight’...until the end?”

“Eh? Oh, sure, sure. I kind of like this scenario too.” He smiled and nodded at her. “I mean, I get to hold your hand in front of everyone!”

In her shrine maiden outfit, Asama smiled at what she saw from Class 2-Plum on the sign frame.

...They’re all getting along just fine.

The wind washed over her on the bow of the Fushimi Castle. She was on the deck located behind the stage.

The ship provided a view of the air, the sea, and even the mainland in the distance, but it was a much smaller space than the Musashi. Even the departing Asama Shrine transport ship felt large in comparison.

The bow felt unsteady because it shook more than the stern had during the “supply carrying”.

And right now, the cargo elevator in the center of the deck was lowered. When it rose, it would carry them and their things to the underground dressing room.

But when she checked the sign frame to pass the time...

Bell: “Eh? G-greet them?”

Back in the classroom, the cosplay teahouse was coming to an end. Suzu and the others were going around giving a final greeting to the people who had come as customers and those in the hallway who had not arrived in time for a table.

Suzu sounded unsure what to do, but he had to be escorting her.

Then she'll be fine, Asama thought with bitterness entering her smile.

"Oh? What has you grinning?"

Kimi's voice arrived from the left.

Asama looked over to see the girl in a shrine maiden outfit and with drums floating around her. Mitotsudaira wore a blue shrine maiden outfit and she was carrying their instruments hanging from a metal scaffolding pipe.

"I would really like to have these shipped back."

"Thank you so much, Mito. I had the bigger things shipped here, but I also had a lot of preparing to do for the mysterious phenomenon purification. On the way back, I'll have the arrangements made for everything that isn't crucial."

"Please do," said Mitotsudaira with her eyebrows lowered in a smile, so it must have been a burden.

And because of that...

"Oh, I brought a bacon set I got at the Blue Thunder, so use that to recover your strength before the performance."

"Y-you are so well prepared! So that's what that smell was. I thought it was from the theatre stands."

The Cerberus barked happily from atop her head.

That brought a smile to Asama's lips and then she saw a familiar sight in the empty sky.

First, she saw the large sign frame saying something was leaving stealth-mode Musashi. And Naito and Naruze appeared from beyond it. They both wore their uniforms and they appeared to be riding Naito's broom.

Another large sign frame appeared behind them and a transport ship headed

for Aki left the stealth barrier.

The wind of the transport ship's passage accelerated the Technohexen broom.

"They've noticed us, haven't they?"

Asama waved at them, but Kimi looked up.

"They only have their guitars and a simple bag with them. They clearly know what they're doing."

"Yeah, with all the doujin events and such, they're used to shipping their equipment in ahead of them."

"That's right," said Mitotsudaira while sniffing out the appropriate bag and opening it to find the meat inside. "Yes...I can't wait until later..."

That's Mito for you, thought Asama. And then...

"Ahh, can you hear me? Ahh. Ahh. Ahhhhhhhhhhh!"

She looked to the stage where she heard Torii's voice from beyond the stage's back wall.

Her microphone-amplified voice would be reaching the Musashi as well.

"Okay, good work on the 1647 Spring School Festival. Anyway, that's over now."

"I-isn't she being a little too casual!?"

"Her greeting at the opening ceremony was about as casual."

But the next thing Torii said brought Kimi to a stop.

"Get going to the next stage, okay?"

Asama had to question the way Torii said "get going".

...She's probably trying to support everyone from Musashi.

She can't say "come here" because no one can hope to reach her level.

I see, thought Asama with a nod of understanding. Meanwhile, Mitotsudaira also turned toward the unseen stage and stretched her back.

The Cultural Committee students working to move equipment around did the same.

Everyone involved in the Gagaku Festival listened to Torii.

“Okay, if you can clean up in a hurry, take a quick break, and come on over to the Fushimi Castle, then you do that. If you can’t, enjoy the broadcast from wherever you are. We’re gonna make it exciting. So...”

Everyone listened to her words.

“The Spring School Festival is over. The Gagaku Festival begins now.”

While helping construct the audience seating, Masazumi realized how poorly she had planned this out.

...I should have brought a change of clothes with me.

She had arrived in the morning, lined up seats, and carried over the materials for building the tiered seating and the food stands to surround it all. That had left her tired and sweaty, so she wished she had come in her track suit instead of her school uniform.

But she did appreciate the food she was given for helping out.

“Eh? Musashi’s laborers eat this well?”

She had been astonished, but she wanted to believe that was the normal reaction and not one of a poor person.

However, the transport ships from Musashi started bringing over audience members instead of materials and viewing ships from Aki started to appear in the sky.

There were also relay ships from Sanuki and M.H.R.R.

...This isn’t an international event, but we can still show off what Musashi can do.

From a political perspective, it was a chance to exhibit their influence and power to the other nations.

She felt taking part on the administrative side had to be a meaningful thing

for her.

“...Eh?”

Just then, she saw a familiar face.

It was a name inheritor: Suzuki Magoichi. She was being checked in on the starboard aft side of the tiered seating.

...*Why?*

That question occurred to Masazumi because of what Neshinbara had said the other day: Suzuki Magoichi would slay Torii Mototada in the Siege of Fushimi Castle that led up to the Battle of Sekigahara.

“Surely not.”

Her concern was eliminated by a certain fact: Suzuki did not have her rifles with her. The female guard performing the inspection checked through Suzuki’s things.

“————”

And she was waved through.

...*Good.*

Did Masazumi think that because she was still fixated on name inheritors and the history recreation?

She was not quite sure why Suzuki had a few charms pasted to her right horn, but this level of fixation was too much for a normal student.

Suzuki was not a friend and Masazumi was overthinking this.

“Huh? Hey, Seijun!”

A group in white gi entered through the port aft entrance.

The group was dressed as karate fighters, but Masazumi did not recall knowing any of those.

“Oh, it’s Aoi.”

The rest were other classmates. They were mostly the boys, but Heidi was there in a girl’s karate fighter costume.

Mukai alone wore something like a Weiss Hexen dress.

Masazumi raised a hand in greeting and they made their way toward the front of the audience seating. Neshinbara took the lead and his sign frame pointed them toward an area somewhat port of center.

The only seats in front of them were for the Chancellor's Officers and Student Council who had to be present for the mysterious phenomenon purification.

Those are pretty good seats, thought Masazumi as the stage lights came on.

The stage was made to rotate so the backstage was brought to the front. While one band performed, the next would prepare in the back.

Masazumi had heard it was constructed especially for the Gagaku Festival and that appeared to be true.

Then the Vice President appeared on the stage. She was equipped with a light mobile shell and a cowering spear for the mysterious phenomenon purification. The ribbons decorating the spear and armor in places must have been her way of dressing it up for the festival.

"Umm." The Vice President spoke to the gathering people with the microphone in one hand. "We're going to get started soon, but with the mysterious phenomenon purification coming up afterwards, be prepared to evacuate to the left and right, okay? The aft exit will probably get clogged up, so be patient if anything happens."

"That's not very reassuring!" everyone shouted while laughing and a large sign frame appeared on the stage.

Footage of flowing clouds played in the background while forceful music with a feeling of "whiteness" played. The logos for the Chancellor's Officers, Student Council, Musashi's 8 ships, and the sponsors from the corporate guilds appeared on the screen. There was one for the Konishi family, but the last one was for the Asama Shrine.

"Huh?"

A purification song played, but wasn't that Asama's voice?

...Nooo!

On the elevator into the dressing room, Asama fell to her knees while holding her biwa guitar case. The song she heard was undoubtedly hers.

“If you see impurities, please cleanse and purify them.”

That was Musashi Asama Shrine’s Prayer #12: Musashi Tuning – Song Version. It was a modern version her family had made to help people understand Shinto prayers. It was about tuning a location, so it made sense to play it at the opening of a festival. She had in fact heard it used that way a few times.

But it felt like a terrible counterattack when she was performing.

“Heh heh,” laughed Kimi. “This is the one you used as an offering at New Year’s last year, isn’t it?”

“I-I didn’t expect to have an old one sprung on me like this...”

“What’s wrong with that?” asked Mitotsudaira. “And this will happen a lot more from now on. Footage of today will be viewable on Musashi’s divine network forevermore.”

“That may be true,” said Asama while the lyrics continued.

“The pale sky is asking for purification.”

“So I beseech you,” sang Kimi to match the song. Then she said, “Now, then.”

The elevator began to move. It descended down into the ship.

And Kimi looked up into the square of late afternoon sky visible overhead.

“The rock cave is closing. ...I just hope the stage has been kept warm when the goddess makes her appearance.”

At the same time, they heard cheers from the sky – from the stage.

“Then let’s get started.”

That was Vice President Ookubo Tadayo’s voice. And at the same time, two figures flew down from the heavens.

It was Naito and Naruze. They landed on the elevator and then noticed the girls already there.

“————”

They must not have wanted to interrupt the voice on the stage because they silently showed off their teeth in a smile.

Everyone must have been in the audience already. So...

...Everything is in place.

Just as Asama thought that, she heard cheers. And the amplified voice made an announcement.

“The '47 Gagaku Festival...begins now!!”

Chapter 15: Surprise Stage Performer

第十五章

『舞台への飛び込み者』



それは飛び入りと言うには
少々派手で
それは来客と言うにも
少々派手で
配点 (乱入者)

That is too flashy

To call an impromptu performance

That is too flashy

To call an audience member

Point Allocation (Intruder)

Watanabe was out in the city.

She lived on Okutama. Specifically, the student dorm wide block on the second underground level.

When she woke, it was already the afternoon and her divine mail inbox was filled with reports on the Tama collapse and security for the Gagaku Festival. She appreciated the occasional messages from Oosuga and Tadayo which both wished her well and kept her updated, but the excessively worried messages from her family made her smile.

She figured stopping by her family home might be a good idea. Oume wasn't that far away.

But once she arrived on the surface using a crutch, she changed her mind.

There were large images in the sky.

One giant sign frame was visible from the academy schoolyard, the stairs leading down from there, the second schoolyard, and the plaza. There were also countless smaller sign frames on the road to the bow, in the parks, and elsewhere.

They were all broadcasting the Gagaku Festival stage.

This would of course not be limited to Okutama. Every part of all eight ships would be receiving this broadcast.

It would be the same in any underground areas where people tended to gather. You would also be able to view it on a personal sign frame using Musashi's internal divine TV channel.

"They're going all out on this one..."

Just like her, everyone else was buying something to eat and drink at the festival stands and sitting down in the parks or streets to take a break.

The music was already audible and the MC was making introductions and jokes.

“————”

There were impressed voices, laughter when someone messed up, and cheers of support.

...That's right.

Watanabe was not a part of that. There was no point in coming to a stop here.

She tied her hair back with a handkerchief as a sort of disguise and walked to a festival stand.

It had been so long since she just enjoyed the festival atmosphere.

And it might never happen again.

“I'll leave this to you, everyone.”

She ordered a kebab sandwich in lieu of breakfast and looked to the sign frame in the sky.

Four bands had already performed. It was about time to reach those who had real skill instead of just enthusiasm.

Naruze completed her preparations while listening to the deafening noise around her.

They had been given a 6 square meter room as a dressing room. Below the white light of a glow panel, the reverberation of the Gagaku Festival reached the new wood-floored room with enough force for their things to shake.

The band before them “Yes, We Can Banter” was making an impressive effort. The time limit kept them from doing their specialty MCing and folding screen drawing performance, but their musical performance was overwhelming the audience.

...Not bad at all.

They had brought in large folding screen speakers, but how many layers did those use?

A high volume was a powerful weapon in a live performance if you could control it without any crackling. After all, live performances were all about experiencing the sound with your entire body.

This was not the time or the place to be stiff and formal.

So the audience members would each support the band that had excited them the most. That was all it was. No matter how excellent your style, no matter how good your musical talent, and even no matter how terrible a musician you were, popularity at a concert came down to pulling off a power play in your own way.

“In that case...”

Naruze amplified the sound of her guitar and checked the movement of her fingers using the Magie Figur by her ear.

Margot responded with a nod in the opposite chair.

“We use Magie Figurs, so the sound is flatter, but we can pull off anything depending on the power.”

“We need to put Kimi’s tuning data to good use.”

Of course, they could no longer aim for being the loudest band. Going loud after another loud band would only exhaust the audience. They would think “this again?” and it would have the opposite effect.

“But, well, we still need enough volume to keep them from cooling off.”

However, they had an even more useful weapon.

“Let’s go with a different kind of song, music, and...”

Naruze stood up. The sign frame above the door asked them to get ready.

Their time on the stage was nigh.

She reached a hand out toward Margot and the other girl took it. But...

“Margot? What’s so funny?”

“You’re pulling me along with your energy, Ga-chan.”

Naruze thought about what that meant and then smiled a little.

“Well, you put together our stage choreography, so I can’t wait. ...Let’s give it everything we’ve got and try to win this thing, okay?”

Suzu was sitting in a seat.

...*Wow.*

The sound was incredible.

The concept of senses seemed to have lost all meaning. The sound seemed to permeate her body just like the heat when she went out during the day.

It almost seemed violent, but...

“No...”

When she opened herself up to the sound, she could tell. All of the reverberations passing through her body were created by people.

She had heard the same thing at her family’s bathhouse and the Asama Shrine.

It was the same as what Kimi, Naito, Naruze, Mitotsudaira, and the others had spent so much time creating.

People who could create such things had gathered here to send out the sounds so that all could hear.

The sound would sometimes crackle with static, but Suzu knew what that was.

...*It’s like when...you mess up your line.*

Or when Tenzou-kun...stumbles on his words.

Looking at it like that helped her relax.

The volume of the performers’ voices came from their desire to have their creation reach the audience. When looking at the intensity as a reflection of

their feelings, the songs seemed like such adorable things. After all, the lyrics were mostly about love, one's own worries, or old stories.

Everyone is...working so hard, thought Suzu.

In that case, was entrusting herself to the voices of those emotional giants the same as letting colossal arms hold her? When people swung their arms and raised their voices to match the singer, were they shedding tears of sympathy in response to that embrace?

...Ah.

Suzu felt heat in her cheeks as she realized how eloquent she was being.

She was letting the setting influence her. She needed to listen to the songs to sense their meaning.

"Right."

Just as she thought that, her surroundings erupted with applause.

"Okay, here they come," *he* said while standing next to her.

There was no point in asking who "they" were. Two people would be appearing on the stage.

"Next up is the new second year unit Eisen! The duo is made up of Margot Naito and Marga Naruze. They've flown in from the sky while also advertising for their delivery business! They have three songs prepared for us today!"

With the MC's introduction, the stage rotated.

However, the reverse stage only had two guitars on it.

...Where are Ga-chan...and Go-chan?"

Above? thought Suzu as she directed her senses there, but she sensed nothing.

Then where? she wondered.

"Yeah!!"

It came from behind.

Far above the tiered seating, two sets of flapping wings dove down along a

shallow angle.

Except they dove toward the audience seating.

It was a direct hit.

The illumination spell spotlights got in the way, thought Naito.

The light in her eyes had confused the landing point. But she had already judged it by eye. She made a head-first dive below the tiered seating and along the passageway leading directly to the stage. And there...

“———”

She had essentially been falling head-first, so she forcibly flapped her wings in midair.

The bursting sound of struck air shook the audience seating, whipped up the wind, and turned her body in a half rotation.

She made a forced midair forward flip to land on her feet.

It was a skill winged species learned to land without lowering their speed when moving at high speeds or in emergencies. Naito had done it on the starboard side. The beating of the air she heard to port had to have been Naruze doing it.

They flipped around and landed hard on their heels. But...

...It's not over yet!

In a second forceful action, Naito used the momentum of the half flip to stand up. And as she tilted forward...

“———!!”

She flapped her main wings straight backwards.

She flew. She threw the air backwards and instantly reached a height of 20-or-so meters.

The crowd cried out in surprise as they briefly lost sight of her and then found her again. Most of the audience had seen them by now.

...Okay!

They flew in tall arcs to land on the stage. Naito to starboard and Naruze to port.

They glided with their wings and arms spread high. They ignored the fluttering of their uniform sleeves and skirts. They could not show any fear of falling, so they raised one knee.

“There.”

They turned to face the audience. Their trajectory took them from the sky to the stage. If they landed like this, the crowd was sure to cheer for them. But...

“Here goes!”

Naito shouted toward the audience. Naruze did the same on the port side. They did so while raising their brooms high in their right hands.

“Verwandlung!!”

Immediately, a metallic cry sounded and their Technohexen equipment was summoned behind them.

Naruze fully spread her black wings.

“Weiss Fräulein...!!”

Out of the corner of her eyes, she saw Margot kicking her golden wings up in the air to starboard.

Her partner clearly matched the timing of her cry.

“Schwarz Fräulein...!!”

And it came.

Their voices were answered by flowers blossoming behind them.

The spell cloth forming their Technohexen outfits budded from a phase space.

Two Technohexen outfits blossomed: a white one for Naruze and a black one for Margot. Naruze thought it created a nice contrast for hers to have a touch of green and Margot's to have a touch of orange.

Also, Naruze held a white pen and Margot's broom glowed.

The Orei Metallo embedded in both were flashing with a yellow light to give off a warning. The light was accompanied by an audible warning.

“Expanding allotted space. Everyone, please be careful.”

At the same time, the white and black flowers behind them came and wrapped around them.

Both costumes were nothing more than angularly cut lengths of cloth that resembled bandages. But the Technohexen outfits danced in the air and calmly raced toward their bodies.

It reached their neck, chest, sides, waist, between their legs, between their butt cheeks, around their feet, and at the base of their throat.

“Hee hee.”

Their skin was only visible for an instant.

In exchange for the luxurious feeling of having clothes tailored, their uniforms were spatially cut away and drawn back into the allotted space.

It was like water dripping from their bodies after leaving the bath. And the towels they donned were Technohexen aerial combat uniforms. The clothing tightened around every part of their body and then loosened a bit to allow for some clearance.

...Here it comes.

The iconic Technohexen combat equipment was ejected into the air. The Technohexen hats, gloves, shoes, armor skirts, puffy shoulder armor, and the rest were based around M.H.R.R. white and black hard points. They all instantly attached to the Technohexen inner suits.

They lightly spread their elbows in midair and twisted their bodies as if dancing so it all fit in place.

They were now Technohexen equipped with Technohexen hats and long skirts.

But it did not end there. In order to stop the audience from applauding,

Naruze and Margot looked each other in the eye and gave a shout.

“Come out, Schwarz Fräulein!

“Come on, Weiss Fräulein!”

A moment later, steel parts were ejected around Naruze and Naito’s raised pen and broom.

These were the Verstärken Schale of Technohexen.

...*Hold on...!*

Masazumi stopped collecting trash as part of the staff and instead looked up at the stage where Magie Figurs were opening in the air.

The large sign frame behind Naito and Naruze was repeatedly replaying the transformation scene from multiple angles.

But what had happened just a few seconds before no longer mattered. Some of the editing was clearly searching for the instant in which they had been naked, but they had bigger problems.

What had been ejected behind those two was what mattered.

Those collections of components looked an awful lot like rifles.

Masazumi was of course familiar with *schale besen*. Anyone would have learned that much after living on Musashi for a month.

But something was clearly different about these two. The two girls held them up in their right hand or left hand. Others in the crowd commented on the composition of the cowling constructed by the repeated ejections.

“Hey, look at that! It’s a full cowling...”

Yes.

Technohexen attacked using those brooms.

But not even Wild Kamelie’s broom had had a full cowling.

And yet...

“So Musashi now has two full cowling brooms. A white one and a black one.”

Solid sounds continued to arrive from the air.

The cowling brooms achieved their full form in the Technohexen's hands.

The cowlings used a broom or a pen as a core and square bolts ejected from empty air fixed the parts in place.

At the same time, the white and black Technohexen outfits gained ribbons and their full bodies were fixed in place.

Then ether light pulsed through the joints of the cowling brooms' parts.

The metallic sound of it all fitting together rang loud and far.

"Here we go..."

The Magie Figurs they held up forcefully detonated.

The familiar voices of Naito and Naruze rang through the explosion of light.

"Complete! Zwei Fräulein!"

Naito was awash in bursting light.

The explosion of light came from more than just their Magie Figurs. The large sign frame meant to decorate the stage had also exploded.

...Wow, we're just going with it, aren't we!?

We didn't ask if we could do that, so I hope it's okay.

She then landed on the stage and turned toward the audience. She raised her broom on her left and pointed her right hand toward the crowd.

But she could not see them with all the giant sign frame's fragments filling the air as ether light.

There was just one thing she knew: she heard nothing at all from the crowd.

She could not hear anything even from the Magie Figur she had next to one ear as a personal speaker. The only sound was the shattering of the many sign frame fragments.

No, she could hear one other thing: her own pulse. That rhythm beat in her temples.

...Am I feeling impatient?

She wanted to see the audience. She wondered what everyone was doing there.

Was there any point in the poses she and Naruze were striking?

She did not know.

They had learned from the rehearsal, so the two of them stood a good distance apart on the stage. But was that working against them? Or wasn't it?

In the end, they had done what they had done, so it felt like they just had to do what they could do. But...

"Margot."

She heard her partner's quiet voice from the Magie Figur by her ear.

"Don't worry. Don't forget that I hear the same thing."

That reminded Naito of a moment from the past.

...Oh, yeah. That's right.

Even if there was no sound outside of them, they heard the same thing.

It was not logical. That was about right for someone who acted on momentum. *Thanks, Ga-chan.*

So Naito stomped her heel while still pointing towards the silent audience. She stomped the intro tempo loud enough for the audience to hear. That way they could start the first song at any time.

Naruze stomped her foot in response.

Once they knew they were together, their stomping grew in intensity. Naito shook her body and shoulders, tensed her sides, and finally let her broom float up.

...Ah.

The light was clearing away.

The ether light fragments scattered like cherry blossoms and the crowd came into view in the night.

None of them said anything. But...

“Ah...”

Every single person there had *stood up* from their seats. So Naito relaxed her mouth and...

“Hoiiii!!!”

“What kind of call was that?”

Suzu smiled bitterly at Neshinbara’s comment. But...

“Hoiiii!!!!!!”

The audience erupted. And it was started by the students in the tiered seating who wore Technohexen outfits. They were apparently the academy’s Technohexen. They all pointed toward Naito and Naruze, and...

“...!”

They all gave their own cheers of encouragement and excitement. Their voices formed a wave and moved the rest of the crowd.

“———! ————!”

When Naito and Naruze swayed on the stage, everyone raised their arms and cheered in unison.

Just then, Naito and Naruze opened their mouths.

They played music and began to sing.

“They’re going with Eisen for the first song!?”

Kimi nodded at Mitotsudaira’s question while making some final adjustments to their tuning data.

They had a lot of equipment, so their dressing room was 12 square meters. Even so, there was barely any space left and they could hear Naito and Naruze’s voices as well as...

“Listen to those cheers. The crowd is really into it. They’re loving this

Technohexen exhibit.”

“Our Magie Herrlich knows no bounds...!” they sang.

They really do seem to know no bounds, thought Kimi while narrowing her eyes.

Since their first song was the poppy Eisen...

“I bet their second song will be the softer Morgen Nacht.”

“Eh? Should they really be lowering the energy of their Technohexen song?”

“Everyone is focused on them thanks to their entrance, so it would be a waste to rely on pure energy and volume for two songs in a row. That’s why they chose Eisen as the first song. It’s a new Technohexen song instead of an old one and it’s about their position at the top of the delivery business. They’re showing off everything the audience wants to see and hear from them. ...These outfits and this song give a clear answer as to what happened to them after the battle the other night.”

“In that case,” said Mitotsudaira with her eyebrows somewhat raised. “They will choose a more traditional Technohexen song like Morgen Nacht because they are confident everyone is focused on them?”

“I imagine Naito ordered the songs this way because she predicted this.”

Naruze would have started with Morgen and gone with gradually increasing energy from there. But...

“When I woke this morning,” sang one Technohexen. “You were not by my side.”

Kimi was right. It was Morgen.

“Do you get it? Because the previous band focused on volume, they used the lingering intensity to fuel their own entrance. But they have actually been gradually lowering the energy level. The previous band performed three loud songs → a flashy entrance after only a short break → a pop song. So going with Morgen here only continues the trend. And since everyone has calmed down while focused on them...”

“Is there no avoiding it?” sang the Technohexen.

Then the girls in the audience cheered.

Mitotsudaira was sensitive to sound, so she looked up. And with a bark from the Cerberus...

“Wh-what was that?”

“Heh heh. I imagine they hugged and kissed. I mean, they stood far apart on the stage during the first song, right? But now that everyone is looking at them, they went for Morgen, which puts them closer together. They’re probably using the whole stage to move together and separate.”

“It’s the same as always,” they sang. “Why are you crying?”

Another cheer.

To 1st years, 2nd years were adults. To 3rd years, they were cute underclassmen. They were also flashy white and black Technohexen, so having them embrace was bound to get a response.

But in that case...

“Kimi, this might be exciting in a quieter sort of way, but what about the next song? They’ll have to get things boiling again, but aren’t things a little too quiet for that now?”

“Those two have the perfect song for building excitement, don’t they? A song everyone is familiar with so they can pick up on it easily.”

Namely...

“Kin Kon Kan Kon. ...That’s up next.”

Naomasa was adjusting the power output in the engine division.

The festival was effectively over on Musashi. They had been providing extra power for the festival, but she wanted to return that to its original standby setting before too late at night. Musashi and the engine division agreed on this, so Naomasa was using Jizuri Suzaku to directly adjust the largescale power devices.

The work itself was simple. She used Suzaku and a specialized wrench to turn

bolts taller than she was. The bolts were connected to stoppers within the control devices, so...

“The bolts are something like a faucet.”

However, there were a lot of them and the output balance would get screwed up if it took too long to finish. That required cooperation from the other gods of war, but...

“Hey! Quit getting distracted by the Gagaku Festival footage!”

“But your classmates are performing!”

“And if I can hold off on watching it, so can you! You’re recording it, aren’t you!?”

She heard some bitter laughter, but she also heard the song.

Kin Kon Kan Kon.

A few days ago, Naito had asked her how she would like to be mentioned in the lyrics. But...

...When I told her I wouldn’t be offended if she just left me out, she looked legitimately confused.

Most likely, Naito had not been doing it out of kindness. She was just a perfectionist who wanted to get the entire class into the song.

If there had been any hint that Naito was putting her in there so she wouldn’t feel left out, she would have refused to be in the song. But Naito had looked utterly disgusted and waved her hands back and forth.

“No, no, no. That would just be creepy.”

“Then don’t bother. I don’t like standing out anyway. Besides, looking at the lyrics, you do mention ‘everyone’.”

“Judge, judge. Then I’ll rewrite it like that.”

What Naomasa heard next may have been the result of that conversation.

“Kin kon kan kon.”

“Everyone does their own thing.”

That's right, thought Naomasa. *Everyone does their own thing.*

This would be the first time the audience heard the song, but they could all sing along to the “kin kon kan kon” part. So when it came to that part, Naito or Naruze would hold their microphone toward the crowd: “Kin kon kan kon...!”

It was endearing how everyone's voices were not quite in sync. But live performances like this were not about everyone being together. It was important for everyone to do their own thing while thinking about the same thing.

So Naomasa hummed along to the music and the others in her team was probably doing so as well.

“C'mon, let's move on to the next controller! We can leave this one to Old Man Taizou!”

“Musashino” watched the Technohexen finish their song while cheers and applause washed over them.

She stood on the open-air bridge to the rear of the Fushimi Castle. That deck was a level higher than the top of the tiered seating, so Naruze and Naito had used it to jump into the audience.

“Musashino” saw Naruze waving back at everyone who was thanking her.

...Cases like this are rare for Naruze-sama, aren't they?

The automatons did not have much data accumulated on Naruze.

“Musashino” decided they needed to monitor her reactions to things since she would be a representative of the delivery business.

The rest of the bands would also have unique requirements.

“Musashino” had worked to set things up differently for each band. Asama had already given her ether pathways for each one. Using those as a baseline, she still had time to set everything up.

...There was no need to go that far before.

But Eisen had taken a lot of work.

She had been relieved that they did almost no adlibbing, but they had fired up the audience far more than expected.

Eight devices for storing ley line stagnations were installed below the Fushimi Castle's deck. A few of those had grown warm from the people's excitement during the Gagaku Festival.

"But this performance shifted a few of them into startup mode. Over."

The question was how much more excitement the 3rd year band would produce. Eisen had only achieved that response because several factors had aligned just right.

But now that the containers had started up, they would begin extracting ley line stagnations. And "Musashino" wanted to control the power output of the bands that could influence that. So...

...I need to set up individual settings.

Just as she decided on that, she received a divine transmission from "Kokubunji", one of her subordinates.

Kokubunji: " 'Musashino'-sama, the Chancellor has contacted us. She says her band wants to go all out, so she would like control of the Torii clan's Fushimi Castle during their performance. Over."

She was essentially telling "Musashino" to stop managing the power output so the performance could be as exciting as possible.

"Musashino" thought the request was a reasonable one. She would be busy enough setting up the output settings for the rest of the bands and the Chancellor's band was bound to be exciting regardless, so she could let the owner of the ship control her own band's performance.

Musashino: "It is a good idea, but I unfortunately cannot allow it. Over."

Yes, she could not hand over full control of the Fushimi Castle. If she did, she could not ensure the safety of everyone aboard. So...

Musashino: "I will keep control of ship movement and return control of the stage output and storage devices to the Torii clan. How about that? Over."

Magoichi was surprised at how well she fit in here.

She lived a life centered on combat, so she was aware there was little entertainment in it.

So she was surprised to find this unfamiliar type of music seemed to jump inside of her.

“Is it the drums...?”

She knew little about music, so she could not describe it. But the drums sounding in the back shook her more than the string instruments on top.

When focusing on the music that sounded on top, she could identify which parts were European and which were Far Eastern, but the beating drums carried her away whether or not she understood it or focused on it.

Of course, this was not just a fundamental rhythm.

If that was all it was, the people around her would not be standing up and cheering.

But it was familiar enough to her that she could tap her feet to the beat.

She had never heard any of these songs before, so she found that strange.

...But...

She had felt a rude gaze for a while now.

And it was not the curious looks a name inheritor often received. It was a cautious gaze watching to see if she would try anything.

If Mototada had her way, no one would be monitoring her. To ensure no one interfered, she would not inform anyone else and just let Magoichi handle it. That was what Mototada would do and the people close to her would respect that.

In that case, thought Magoichi. Do I have Watanabe from yesterday to thank for this?

She had heard that Watanabe was injured and had dropped out of the Gagaku Festival. She had not actually contacted Mototada’s group, but nothing had happened on the way here and the audience had not been filled with

personnel meant to target her.

The gaze she felt now was the work of an individual.

She could think of plenty of reasons someone might be after her life, but this person would have acted by now if that were the case. Instead, they simply observed her.

Someone was definitely watching her to see what she would do.

The odd feeling about her surroundings told her it was definitely just the one person.

This was an individual act.

Watanabe could no longer be here as the 1st Special Duty Officer, so she must have asked someone else to keep an eye on Magoichi.

But who did the gaze belong to?

There was definitely someone in the crowd whose movements were slightly off from the rest. She picked up on it subconsciously, but when she actually focused on it, she could not quite locate it. The directionality of her focus was so much stronger than her subconscious senses that she crushed whatever it was she had sensed.

She had spent some time trying to trick herself by sending out a presence in search of whoever it was, but she had had no luck.

Whoever it was had to be skilled.

Also, the ninja student next to her was far too noisy. He had to be a 2nd year. That made him a year her elder, but he held ninja sword glow sticks between his fingers and swayed back and forth far too much. He was currently shouting at the mummy-style band, Dry Verse.

“Dry-chaaaaaaan! H-hwaaaaaaah!”

In a way, his bad example helped her calm herself. Hiding his face behind a hat and scarf may have allowed him to become entirely shameless.

Of course, she set aside the fact that such thoughts did not belong here. However...

“Okay, we’re getting close to final performance now! Are you all ready for the mysterious phenomenon purification!? Then let’s do some stretching to help you relax and get fired up! ...Ooooookay! Everyone together now! ...Ooooookay! Are you in sync now!? No one fell asleep!? Then it’s time for the penultimate performance. I know you’ve all been waiting for Kagami, the Chancellor’s Officers and Student Council band!”

That was Mototada’s band.

The stage rotated, lots of white smoke rose from it, and a sudden sound started.

The MC gave a shout.

“Their first song is Mismatch. Their keyboardist, Watanabe-san, is out after being caught in the collapse last night, but I’m sure the others will work extra hard to make up for her absence!”

“Collapse-chaaaaaaaaaan! H-hwaaaaaaaaaaaahh!”

Shut up, ninja. And do you have to add “-chan” to every random word that comes along?

But if Mototada was on stage...

...Both of us just have to leave things in the other’s hands.

After changing the color of his ninja sword glow sticks, Tenzou saw Magoichi suddenly stand up where she sat next to him.

...Has she noticed I’m watching her!?

She was a name inheritor and a Gun Master who primarily fought as a sniper. It would not be surprising if she had picked up on him watching her.

That was why he had spent what little time he had preparing. He had memorized the high points of all the bands’ announced songs and lyrics. He had studied the most common moments for reactions and cheers. He had also trained himself to chatter on and on for about 20 minutes about band trivia if she happened to talk to him.

Had she seen through it?

But after she stood up...

“Excuse me. I’m feeling a little sick.”

...Eh? Did I take it too far?

Immediately assuming that might be a flaw of mine.

But Magoichi bowed to the people around her and walked to the aisle. Everyone was quick to respond once they noticed. They stood from their seats and stepped back to let her through.

...Where is she going?

If she left here, she would be unable to “slay” Torii.

Guards and automatons were monitoring things and the passageways were sealed off except where necessary for the Gagaku Festival. If she tried to force her way through, it would cause an immediate commotion on this 300m ship.

“In that case...”

He could not let her notice him watching her.

Torii’s band was visible on the rotating stage. The crowd’s cheers grew and their voices began to align.

But the gunner was leaving.

...What is this?

Just as he wondered that...

“Hm?”

He felt a certain reverberation in his body.

A small but definite vibration reached his feet from the deck.

The music was already beginning the long intro of the first song, but Tenzou sensed a sound hidden behind it.

...What is this!?

Suzu sensed something was off.

...Huh?

What was this? Separate from the music, the cheers, and the stomping feet, she sensed a dissonant sound coming from somewhere on the ship.

...Below?

The sound reaching her from there had been absent before. It sounded like large objects turning, connecting, spreading, and opening. It all reached the bottom of her feet from below the deck.

“U-um...Toori...-kun?”

She called to him who was now a crossdressing karate fighter.

“Something’s...starting?”

Asama listened to Torii’s band’s music from behind the stage.

...Wow, their precision is unbelievably high...

Several bands had already performed, but this band was really good at blending the sounds of each member, just like a band from a school club.

Watanabe was absent and her part was being played from the song’s offering data. Asama had expected that part to stand out some, but Tadayo on guitar and Oosuga on drums matched the timing perfectly.

“Heh heh. Not bad. When we’re extracting the mysterious phenomena, we need to match our sounds too, okay?”

“Yes. By ‘matching’, we will connect with the Musashi. Then we will tune the activated storage devices and extract it all during our performance.”

“They say that Hidden Dragon or something might appear when we do, but we can leave that to the Chancellor’s group performing over there and to Adele’s group.”

Mitotsudaira explained that while holding the Cerberus in her arms.

And when Kimi rested her guitar on her shoulder, a sign frame appeared.

“Huh? Toori-kun? Is this for Kimi? ...No?”

“Oh, what’s this?” asked Kimi as she turned around and Mitotsudaira tilted her head. They all looked to the text on the sign frame, but it was not all from *him*. He was relaying a question from someone else.

Me: “Bell-san noticed a bunch of movement down below. She says it’s growing and getting in the way of the music. ...So what’s going on?”

“Eh? The storage devices for the extracted stagnations are below here. They should have started up by now.”

Silver Wolf: “Yes, and during our performance, they will begin to run and purify the mysterious phenomena.”

“I can’t directly check since ‘Musashi’ and the other automatons are in control of them, but is Suzu-san saying they’re already running and not just starting up?”

“Wait,” said Kimi. She turned a sharp look toward Asama. “Send a divine transmission to ‘Musashino’. ...See if the extraction system is *still running*.”

Asama nodded, sent the divine mail, and knew Kimi was right.

She had put together some settings for the ether pathway control during the Gagaku Festival.

“Musashino” was supposed to be using those to run the entire ship.

In the planning meeting, they had planned for the storage devices below the Fushimi Castle’s deck to be fully activated during their performance. That would activate the ley line pathways to the Musashi and extract all of the stagnations.

So if Suzu really was sensing *the continuation of the startup process*, why was it happening already?

Asama knew the audience’s excitement from Naito and Naruze’s performance and from the other bands had heated up the storage devices and extraction system, but the full startup process would still need the extractors and storage devices to begin physically moving.

...In that case...

Musashino: “Asama-sama, I have confirmed it. And I would like to confirm something with you as well. Over.”

Asama: “Understood. And what is it you want to confirm with me?”

Musashino: “Judge. Have you transferred your authority to Torii-sama? Over.”

That question elicited a “huh?” from Asama.

Asama: “Are you not running the extraction system early?”

That was what she had assumed.

It was possible their performance would not live up to expectations and the extraction would not go well. So running the extraction system during Torii’s band could help prepare things.

But that was not it. And to prove it...

Musashino: “No, I am not. Over.”

“Musashino” continued as if to clarify her short response.

Musashino: “Currently, I control the ship’s flight management, but Torii-sama controls the extraction system and stage management. Over.”

“...What does that mean?”

Mitotsudaira looked toward Torii’s band from behind the stage.

Of course, all they could see from here was the thick wooden wall between the two stages.

But the three people performing beyond that wall were creating a certain situation.

“The Chancellor’s group is trying to do the mysterious phenomenon purification we were supposed to do!”

“Musashino” was unsure which standards to base her decision on.

Of course, that kind of hesitation only lasted a few moments for an

automaton. She divided that short time into countless pieces and used the instant to work her thoughts.

She first needed to think about a stable flight plan for the Fushimi Castle, but she currently worked on a different task.

That was what she needed to think about next.

...What Torii-sama's band is doing.

The extraction system below the deck was approaching actual work.

The simplest motivation would be a desire to steal Asama's band's role.

But why they would want to do that was unclear.

Why would they tear down Operation Emptying the Cup, which they had planned out together and all agreed to?

She also felt like she had allowed this to happen.

She had temporarily given Torii control.

It had been a suggestion from the Chancellor and Student Council President, the Fushimi Castle belonged to her clan, and she played a role in the operation. That was why "Musashino" had agreed to give her temporary control.

Torii was now "using" that in her own way.

"Musashino" had been naïve.

The decision itself had not been a mistake. A captain automaton could not refuse a suggestion from the Chancellor and Student Council President.

But she had made a mistake in a different way.

"————"

She had not considered the "what ifs" when transferring control to Torii.

Trust was a matter of statistics for automatons. So "trust" itself was had no value. When it worked well, it was the best form of security, but when it did not, it was the worst form of security hole.

She did not know why Torii was doing this, but the girl was preparing to carry out the operation early and under her own control. So what could "Musashino"

do?

“I must prioritize success of the operation on this expedited timetable! Over!!”

The overall objective was to purify the mysterious phenomena threatening Musashi.

Asama’s band had planned to play that role, but Torii was doing it now.

...However, if I stop the extraction system now, all our preparations will be for naught!

“Asama-sama.” “Musashino” spoke to Asama. “I apologize for my poor management. Over.”

After admitting to her mistake and taking a breath, “Musashino” looked to the stage.

In that place about 200 meters away, Torii was singing and dancing, but she turned toward the automaton.

Could she see her?

That question was meaningless. Torii was already giving her a smile with lowered eyebrows and waving her hand side to side. It was an apologetic act.

“Torii-sama...!”

“Musashino” wanted to ask why, but did that mean she was growing too interested in humanity?

At any rate, the first song came to an end.

Just then, “Kunitachi” gave a shout while monitoring the extraction system behind “Musashino”.

“The storage system has been fully prepared within the extraction system! The extraction system is running! Over.”

Suzu felt a definite sound with her entire body.

It came from 8 places below her feet. The metallic shaking had stopped and something else made itself known.

What was it?

She felt it was bad for whatever-it-was to ignore its surroundings and continue on like this. And...

...Eh?

The ship was moving. It was approaching the Musashi with somewhat rushed movements.

“Um, Bell-san? What’s the matter? Is something happening again?”

She could not say yes.

Intense noise and heat struck the Fushimi Castle before she could.

It was lightning. But it was not pure lightning from the sky.

...No!

It was an attack.

Electricity crackled along the Fushimi Castle and struck it.

“...!”

Suzu sensed the 300m ship shake and heard panicked shouts from the tiered seating.

Everyone in the audience stood up and looked up at the attack from empty air.

“Is it the mysterious phenomenon purification!?”

“No...that shouldn’t have started yet. And it shouldn’t be so sudden!”

A confused stir ran through the crowd as every last one of them looked up to the sky.

But it did not end there.

More heat and noise struck the Fushimi Castle from the empty space below it.

There should not have been any storm clouds. Suzu covered her ears over Noise Neighbor.

“...Here it comes!”

It came.

The lightning from below bent like a giant whip but also wrapped around the ship like a solid chain to capture the Fushimi Castle.

It produced a tremor that felt like the floor rising up.

The ship shook.

There were 8 lightning attacks in all. They were in constant motion as they sent heat to the audience and stage.

“—————!”

There was also a great roar.

...Eh?

But it was not from the lightning strikes. This had more substance to it. It was descending from the sky.

It was located beyond the stage. She heard the rotating stage's wall shattering, the falling splinters, and the swooshing of the armor stripped from the ship. And...

“Ah...”

The back of the rotating stage was destroyed by a massively heavy falling object.

The splintering sound Suzu heard pointed to a certain fact.

...Asama-san...Kimi-chan...and Mitotsudaira-san....!

But something moved forward before she could sense anything from those three girls.

This time, Suzu properly sensed the giant form that leaped toward the audience from the splintered stage.

It was...

“The Hidden Dragon from before!?”

No, everyone had defeated that. So another one must have been created. However...

“There’s...more!”

It was not just the Hidden Dragon. Giant forms appeared from 8 locations on the deck.

They had humanoid and blade-like shapes seemingly made from combined swords. There were 8 in all and Suzu knew what to call them.

...Non-Gods.

The 8 Non-Gods stood up around the Hidden Dragon with ether light enveloping them.

Tenzou saw a dragon just as large as the one he had faced along with Asama and the others.

It brought its fore legs and hind legs together in the space between stage and audience.

“Evacuate!!”

He had no idea if his cry reached them in time.

And even if they did escape the dragon, Non-Gods were standing up in 8 directions.

...Not good!

The plan had been for one Non-God to appear at a time during Asama’s band’s songs.

But this was all of them at once. And they were joined by a large Hidden Dragon.

Their training would have been enough to respond if it were the Hidden Dragon and a Non-God or two.

...But...

The enemy took action before he could finish that thought.

The Hidden Dragon used its wings to perform a full charge.

The Fushimi Castle was instantly transformed into a battlefield.

Chapter 16: Creation of an Unrivaled Field

第十六章

『独壇場の作り物』



何だか解らないけど
面倒だったら
全部敵なのよ
配点（楽観主義）

I don't really get it

But if it's too much trouble

Then everyone's my enemy

Point Allocation (Optimism)

P-01s slowly struck the café's divine monitor.

It was crucial she did so at a 45 degree angle and lightly twisted her wrist for a downward blow at the instant of impact.

"But...it still is not showing up. Did I do it wrong?"

While the customers looked on in shock, P-01s rolled up her sleeves for a second attempt.

But someone stepped out of the kitchen before she could send out her right hand.

It was the manager. She carried cups of soup on a tray.

"That's no use, P-01s. This isn't the kind of blackout you can fix by hitting things. The source of the broadcast must have been cut off."

"I see. I have determined my judgment could still use work. ...But what does this mean, manager?"

"Good question," said the manager while serving the soup cups to different tables. "To put it simply, everyone's in trouble."

"M-Makiko! The video cut off! And just as Torii-san and the others were reaching their second song!"

A voice shouted from the top of the bridge stairs in front of Musashi Ariadust Academy.

Sanyou sat on the top step and she pointed at the blacked out sign frame in the sky.

"What does this mean!?"

“Judge. Listen, Mitsuki. If they kept broadcasting, they’d be airing some dangerous footage best described with words like ‘squish’ or ‘crunch’. But the biggest reason is probably issues with the equipment and broadcast pathway.”

“Um, Makiko? How can you be so calm?”

“Well.” Oriotri looked overhead again and finally continued. “Even if I went to save them now, I wouldn’t make it in time.”

“Y-your students are there!”

Sanyou gave her a look that said “I hope they’re all okay” and Oriotri spoke with her eyebrows lowered in a smile.

“Don’t worry. I’m always telling them not to half ass it, so I’m sure they’ll do this right. You’ve taught your kids to do the same thing in your own way, haven’t you? Then trust in that side of yourself.”

Asama looked up at the windy night sky.

...The wind is really strong.

She was in the sky to the east of the Fushimi Castle. She was about 500m away.

Even from there, she could clearly see the lightning continuing to strike the Fushimi Castle and the destruction of the bow.

The Hidden Dragon made a direct attack from the sky which crushed the Fushimi Castle’s bow.

The ether fuel had to be leaking. She could not even see the bow deck due to all the glowing fog and the lightning attacks coming from the Musashi.

She only knew that the destruction of the bow was growing worse.

Because it had fallen behind the stage, the bow had seemingly bounced up in the rebound. Meanwhile, the backstage waiting area and the dressing rooms one floor below the deck had sunk down a level.

She felt a chill when she thought about the possibility of being hit by that, but...

“You really saved me, Naruze.”

Asama spoke to the black wings in front of her.

She was sitting on Naruze's *schale besen* which had a new cowling.

Weiss Fräulein's acceleration had saved her from the falling Hidden Dragon. However...

"Don't worry about it, Asama. I'm glad I didn't abandon you."

That put a small smile on Asama's lips. Naruze phrased it in an unnecessarily complicated way, but she definitely cared about Asama's wellbeing. But saying anything further would only cause Naruze to deny it.

"Then, um, good job noticing the Hidden Dragon, Naruze."

"I'm not sure what that 'then' refers to, but it was pure coincidence I noticed it. ...Margot and I were getting a little overexcited on the bow deck, she pushed me down to have her way with me, and I happened to see a Hidden Dragon falling toward you. At first, I thought about ignoring it since the two of us weren't in its path, but I'm glad I changed my mind."

"How can you say all of that so calmly!? And now I feel kind of sorry for the Hidden Dragon!"

"What's wrong with that?" said Naruze as a Magie Figur appeared next to her face. It was shaped like a speedometer and it was from Naito.

It displayed the Schwarz Hexen's smiling face.

"Hey, you okay, Ga-chan? Oh, I'm to the west."

"I'm fine, Margot. I'm to the east. So did you get the other two?"

"Judge! I picked up Mito-tsan and Kimi-chan. Mito-tsan is on the back and her hair looks like a really cool booster while Kimi-chan is dancing on the nose."

"How are you keeping your balance?"

Naruze sounded annoyed, but Asama knew there was something wrong with her for how easily she imagined that scene. However...

"Um, where is the Hidden Dragon now?"

They could not see the bow or beyond due to the booming lightning attacks and the ether fuel fog.

But a different sound arrived from beyond the 8 lightning strikes.

It reached Asama's ears while Naruze began accelerating in that direction.

"An animal cry!?"

It did not belong to the Hidden Dragon.

She recognized the cry reaching her from that lightning cage.

"It can't be..."

Adele realized the vassal unit had fallen apart in an instant.

It was too sudden.

They had predicted a Hidden Dragon would show up, but 8 Non-Gods at once was well beyond any expectations.

Responding to the Hidden Dragon's charge by gathering in the center and falling back had been good.

But the Non-Gods on either side sent out all the power they had.

The attacks hit the front of the vassal and warrior formation from the side.

The very front of the formation was supposed to be the thickest, but it was torn down from the sides.

...And then the Hidden Dragon's charge hit.

Metal clashed and equipment broke, but it was all so sudden that no one could even cry out in pain.

Adele was near the middle of the formation and she was sent flying too. However...

"...Eh?"

Something was odd.

They had been hit by the Hidden Dragon's charge below the lightning strikes. Or so she thought.

However, her airborne body had little momentum and seemed to have been

hit more by air pressure than a solid blow.

“Is this...?”

They had not been hit by the Hidden Dragon’s charge. Instead of it tackling them with its entire body...

...The explosive blasts from above reached us first!?

She could see the repeated explosive lightning strikes and the glowing ether fog.

But the wind was blowing. The ship’s atmospheric protection must have weakened. At this altitude, the wind did not even smell salty as it raced past the lightning strikes and scattered the ether fragments.

Then Adele saw a giant form in front of her and the Hidden Dragon. It was...

“A Non-Dragon Sword!?”

Tenzou had been in the rear audience seats to monitor Suzuki Magoichi, so he had not been in range of the Hidden Dragon’s charge. He felt bad not being a part of the defensive formation, but that was what had allowed him to survive and observe the scene before his eyes.

They were currently intercepting the enemy while the Fushimi Castle was awash with the 8 lightning attacks forming from the Musashi.

Torii and Magoichi’s history recreation was the least of their worries now. There were 4 Non-Gods on either side, a Hidden Dragon, and something else standing with its back to the students as if to protect them.

“A Non-Dragon Sword...”

He recognized it. This Non-Dragon Sword had appeared before when Asama’s group was having fun with the Hidden Dragon the other day.

The records said this Non-Dragon Sword had fought the parent Hidden Dragon then.

...Of course. Non-Dragon Swords and Non-Gods are generally harmful!

But Tenzou had to wonder why it was protecting them right now.

“————”

A possibility occurred to him.

...Does this Non-Dragon Sword have its origins in something other than a simple stagnation?

That would be the same as Mitotsudaira's Cerberus.

Instead of a stagnation, it would be made from a local spirit or something that existed alongside Musashi's pure ley lines.

He had not investigated it, so he could not reach any conclusions. But there was one thing he could say now: "Everyone! This Non-Dragon Sword is on our side!"

Tenzou saw everyone's reaction to his shout. They all looked his way with eyebrows raised.

"Huh!?"

"What the hell are you talking about!? Do you have any common sense!?"

"What if someone actually believed you and got hit by its tail when it turned around!?"

"Ah! Look how many glow sticks he's got!"

"Nhhh, why did I say anything!? All they're doing is attacking me personally!"

But help arrived: Adele who raised both hands from the front of the crumbling formation.

She fixed her glasses and yelled their way.

"Don't worry, everyone! This Non-Dragon Sword is on our side!"

Tenzou saw everyone's reaction to her shout. They all nodded.

"She's right!"

"You've got a good eye! Sometimes you have to ignore common sense!"

"Did you hear the confidence in her voice!? And there's nothing to worry about with that dragon on our side!"

“Ah! Look, she’s got an official vassal number! She must be skilled!”

“Nhhhh! I feel like I just saw the sexism found in the dark side of society!”

But the end result was what he had wanted.

And while he was at it, he wanted some more help from Adele.

He wanted her to get the others moving.

Everyone was currently being hit by the Non-Gods’ slashes and striking wind. The front line was desperately defending against it all, but their defense was unreliaibly flimsy and, perhaps after seeing that, the Non-Dragon Sword was glaring at the Hidden Dragon without doing anything. So...

“Adele-dono! I want your opinion as the person who once knocked down that Hidden Dragon!” Tenzou pointed at Adele. “What strategy would be best here!?”

Adele spread her mouth horizontally.

Flat Vassal: “Wh-why would you ask so much of me!?”

10ZO: “That’s just how things were going!”

Novice: “Fine then. How about I propose a strategy?”

Almost Everyone: “No, thanks! We’d rather not die!!”

She joined the *tsukkomi* with everyone else without even thinking.

...*Oh, whoops.*

Since she had been asked, she had to do it. So...

“Umm.”

While the wind blew and lightning sparks fell, she hesitated but inhaled.

There were upperclassmen and officers here, but she had experience fighting a dragon.

In that case, she thought while waving an arm and raising her voice.

“Everyone split to the left and right! ...Leave the Hidden Dragon to the Non-

Dragon Sword and defeat the Non-Gods one at a time!”

She moved to port. She dodged scattering rubble while she ran. She activated a defense spell charm in her hand and raised the glowing ether shield while joining the students on the port side.

“Charge!!”

Just as they all started forward, the Non-Dragon Sword moved forward in the center.

After rearranging things, they had all chosen a clash.

“Musashino” monitored the overall situation from the open-air bridge.

Based on her analysis...

...They are just barely holding it together.

A Hidden Dragon and 8 Non-Gods had appeared simultaneously. If nothing was done, their threat to the Musashi would remain. So they had to be destroyed here.

But could they do that?

All she could do was keep the ship stable and use the defense and buffering systems to stop the 8 lightning attacks created from absorbing the stagnation from the Musashi.

In the battle “Okutama” had participated in, tilting the ship had played a major role. But she doubted many people could continue fighting under those conditions. Plus, the normal audience members were here this time. So...

“ ‘Nishi-Kokubunji’, the ship is tilting toward the bow. Lower the stern to level us out. Over.”

The automatons could help by keeping any negative elements away from the battlefield.

However...

“ ‘Musashino’-sama, the Non-Gods have established themselves and begun to move. Over.”

That was bad. The warriors facing the enemy horizontally had yet to notice, but the automatons higher vantage point showed the Non-Gods were moving from their initial positions.

And the Non-Gods were far taller, so they could easily predict the intent behind the warriors' formation.

Then something strange happened.

...The Non-Gods' output is growing?

Perhaps because they had established their forms, the number of slashes and wind strikes was increasing.

"The Fushimi Castle is being surrounded by a Non-God barrier! Over!"

Just like before, a barrier of stormy clouds surrounded the Fushimi Castle.

The 8 of them were reacting to each other's presence and creating a "field" for themselves.

However, thought "Musashino". She had little combat experience with monsters like this, but...

...Do they really move in such a coordinated fashion!?

She began to wonder if something was leading them and the answer reached her in a surprising form.

She heard a voice. It reached her clearly through the wind and thunder.

"A song...!? Over."

Suzu heard a song.

To evacuate, she first retreated down a port side passageway and then moved aft.

The intro she heard was a familiar one. It was a dance song people sometimes sang at the bathhouse karaoke. It began with some deep drums.

"Routine..."

"Hm, is the Student Council President using her song to tell us she is all right?"

Suzu reflexively shook her head at Urquiaga's suggestion.

...No!

She had no real evidence, but her senses told her this was different. The reverberating music and the opening lines heard through the wind were not being used to inform anyone of her safety. It was undoubtedly...

...A song indicating everything happening on the deck!

"Let's head out into the night. Into the city. Just like always. Nothing changes."

That's a...lie, thought Suzu. *How is this...like always? How has...nothing changed?* However...

...Yes.

She sensed it.

She sensed a certain fact after being exposed to so many people's feelings during the performances today. There was someone who had long felt that this battered and broken scene was *like always* and *unchanging*.

The sound was more than just music and song. The thunder and shaking of the ship joined it to convey a certain message.

This was *like always*.

This was *something that should not change*.

...Why?

How could you say that? The lyrics continued to answer Suzu's questions.

"We can all do it."

Did that refer to how everyone was doing their best to resist here? Did it refer to how the Non-Dragon Sword was clashing with the Hidden Dragon and shaking the ship?

"I can do it."

That would be referring to the current situation.

The Student Council President had undoubtedly used her song to intervene in

the mysterious phenomenon purification as the musician of an entertainer god. She had released her heated power and forcibly done what should have been done during Asama's turn.

But why?

"The sky surrounds us. The night surrounds us."

Why had she created exactly that situation?

Torii looked around the half-destroyed stage and unleashed her voice.

She saw the Hidden Dragon's back in front of her and heard the colossal clash. Thanks to her song, the Non-Gods on either side were being pushed to continue their attack.

...But.

"My outstretched arms cannot reach the surrounding cage."

How about it?

"I extend them into the night, but no shade falls on them."

How about this?

"As long as I have my song and my dance."

How about all of this?

"The night's usual atmosphere will invite me out once more."

How about it, everyone?

Adele could tell they were being pushed back.

They were performing charge after charge and shield attack after shield attack, so they should have been moving forward. Yet...

"Let's dance in the night. In the city."

...Kh!

"Just like always. Nothing changes."

That made it sound like...

...This situation is going to keep going forever!

They were pushing, but they were being overwhelmed.

Her legs were heavy, she could not lift her arms, her heart was filled with impatience, and she flinched from the scattering lightning sparks.

She could no longer see the sky. There was only the cage of lightning, the scattering ether light, and...

“Anyone can do it.”

The song said their actions were nothing special and that *anyone could do* them. And...

“Even I can do it.”

The Non-Gods moved forward. Since the vassals and warriors kept up the shield attacks, the enemy kept up its thick air blades and penetrative attacks.

They just kept coming.

“Look up into the sky and see through the night.”

Was the Student Council’s group the only ones who could see that?

When Adele’s group looked up, they only saw the Non-Gods staring down at them and the cage of lightning and dark clouds that hid the sky.

“Kwah...!”

The girl to her right collapsed and was blown away.

...Oh, no!

Adele quickly reached out her right arm.

“And if my embraced heart.”

Was she so desperately supporting that girl for the girl’s sake? Or was it to keep herself focused while she remained here? She could only hear the song:

“Desires to leave that surrounding.”

Not good, thought Adele.

The Non-God in front of her was looking her way. Or it seemed that way to her.

She was now on the front line while supporting the other girl with her right arm. And...

“That heart will.”

Four wind attacks arrived all at once.

From the Non-Gods’ vantage point, the opening there was obvious. And so...

“Surpass its racing pulse.”

The simultaneous attacks shattered Adele’s shield and flew toward her chest.

Adele felt the wind at her ears and saw the four attacks before her eyes at about the same moment.

...I’m dead!!

When the Non-God’s power shook her bangs, she thought, *If my boobs were bigger, this would have hit me 10cm earlier, wouldn’t it?*

I’m glad I don’t have any. Well, no, I’m not. But it’s a good thing right now.

But reality was cruel. She would be blown away soon enough. However...

...Ahh, I was an idiot to let Tenzou-san talk me into this.

If I survive this, I’m getting that ninja to buy me a meal. Yes, that’s what I’ll do.

“But that’s not happening!!”

Just as she spoke her thoughts aloud, the four attacks shattered into light right in front of her.

Suzu sensed a power shatter right in front of Adele.

The four Non-God attacks flying her way had been broken by four destructive forces flying in from behind her. And they all had different forms.

...A spear...money...and an arrow?

Adele and Suzu both turned around.

The open-air bridge was at the top of the tiered audience seating and someone stood there with the rumbling of the lightning attacks in the background.

“Hiii, the wise sister is here to rescue all you fools! C’mon, quit standing there with those glum looks on your faces and give yourselves a shot of energy up the ass! Yes, Adele there! The enemy attacks take longer to hit you, so get to the front already!”

“Why am I being personally attacked here!?”

But while she spoke, Kimi already had several sign frames open around her.

And four other people were lined up alongside her: Naito, Naruze, Mitotsudaira, and Asama.

“Heh heh,” laughed Kimi as she struck a Y pose.

Lightning immediately struck behind her, but her Y did not even waver. Instead, her smile grew and she raised her voice.

“Class Plum Girls! *By going* it together, we will plumb the depths of teamwork!!”

Was the emphasis on “by go” meant as a pun on Oume’s Yoshino Baigou plum orchard?

But Kimi soon pulled a microphone from her cleavage and tossed it to the side.

Mitotsudaira caught the spinning device.

She took just a second to breathe in before shouting in a dignified way.

“Everyone freeze!!”

Adele and everyone around her came to a stop.

The enemy’s attacks were coming. Their giant forms were approaching. However...

“Musashi Knight Rank 1 Nate Mitotsudaira commands you! Remain in a defensive formation and move as instructed!”

Her voice reached them just as two things arrived before them.

One was a sign frame providing the situation on the deck and an attack route based on the vantage point from the open-air deck. The second was a personal defense spell shield from the Asama Shrine.

...Wow.

Support and expectation. Plus a method and power to help. They had supplied everything. And that was after bringing everyone to a stop and bringing them all together in the midst of battle.

They had reset everything.

Everyone took a breath instead of raising their voices.

And in time with that breath, the Rank 1 Knight raised her voice while running down to the deck.

“Vive le roi!”

Long live the king.

Of course, the Far East had no king. The idea was only imaginary. But Adele looked to the others and her surroundings.

This was the site of the Gagaku Festival. The audience seating was already gone and the stage was visible in the distance.

She could hear a song, there were monsters here, a knight had arrived, and the warriors were gathered together. So...

“This is a stage play!”

When someone shouted that, everyone responded. They raised their weapons and shields and roared in unison.

“Vive le roi!”

Long live the king, long live the king. They wished a long life to the king imagined to exist beyond victory in this stage play.

And they heard a song behind them.

It was a knight's song. An old song of the knights who ran along the battlefield and both feared and rejoiced in how animalistic they became.

"Raise your flag, your weapon, and your voice. Howl toward the destination seen up ahead."

They all began marching forward.

"Vive le roooooi!"

Their howling voices and the shine of their weapons rose into the night. They ignored the scattering lightning and charged rapidly forward while staying in step with all the others.

"I carry the past, but not the sins of a dog."

They all smiled. Would such a day ever arrive for the Far East?

"I laugh at the edges of darkness. I always laugh."

"Ohh...!"

Their running quickly shrank the distance from the enemy. They could hear the pounding of their feet and their hearts.

"With no use for sound, only my voice and my leading back summons the light and shows the way."

"Vive le rooooooi!"

They charged. They shattered the Non-Gods' power and secured their own positions. They all worked together...

"In the midst of battle, I find myself, raise my voice, and laugh. I always laugh."

...and they broke it. Again and again, their strength proved it could carry them forward.

Noise rang out and a few were overpowered and blown away.

But the row behind them did not support them. They were old enough to

stand on their own two feet. So...

“If I can move out ahead and show them my back to calm them, I will be the leading fang.”

They roared. When the Non-Gods cried out with their wind, the people responded with the sound produced in their throats.

“Shake off your restraints, be reborn, and pierce me, you cowards. I will still choose to advance.”

They advanced.

“I have no rules, but I have pride. My *fiert* breaks through it all. The accompanying tremor treads on the pieces.”

They could see the enemy. The front line was the safe zone. After all, they had been attacked by the Non-Gods to their sides before, but when directly in front of one, those to the side could not make their attacks.

It was 1-against-1. No, it was 1-against-everyone.

“Don’t claim it’s unfair, okay!?” someone said.

“I shout, ‘hesitate and come for me, you cowards.’ That shout pushes me onward.”

The Non-Gods roared. Everyone gestured toward them in response.

Come. If there is a king beyond this battle, we’ll show him what we can do.

“Vive le rooooooooooooooooooooooooooi!”

They all clashed with the closest Non-Gods to port and starboard.

Light scattered from the impact.

The Non-Gods’ legs shattered, but a wind attack hit the warriors as a counterattack.

The scattering shards of light were from the shields and from the Non-Gods’ bodies. The wind scattered them both equally and, as a result...

“We broke them!”

They would not rest easy. The enemy would regenerate soon enough. After all...

“They can recover as long as the song is extracting the stagnation!”

“Dammit,” someone cursed.

They groaned, but everyone worked together to push onward while the injured moved to the back.

“The Chancellor is doing a hell of a job!”

By now, everyone on the battlefield had figured out the purpose of the battle.

They were not just performing the mysterious phenomenon purification early. This served two purposes: fully eliminating the stagnation surrounding the Musashi and...

“She’s hijacking the purification to show off to the other nations what we can do...!”

“Jacking...off!? Manager, I could not hear most of that due to the static, but what are they doing!?”

“Hmm, explaining it would be too much effort, so you can draw your own conclusions, P-01s.”

“This should make for some good on-site training. What do you think, Makiko-san?”

“Principal Sakai?” Oriotri turned around and saw who was there. “Oh, you’re with him again, ‘Musashi’?”

“Do not be ridiculous. I have only been with him once today. Over.”

“Oh, so you’ve been with him all day.”

“Musashi” gave Oriotri quite the glare, so the rest of the teachers kept their distance.

Except for Sanyou who asked Sakai a question to smooth things over.

“On-site training? Do you mean this show of force to the other nations, Principal Sakai?”

“Judge, that is what this amounts to. ...If this mysterious phenomenon purification is successful, Musashi will have proven something to the other nations.”

That being...

“When Musashi gathers its strength, we can purify some neutral monsters.”

“If that happens, I imagine the Testament Union will keep more of their forces monitoring the Musashi after we leave Aki...”

“True enough.” Sakai scratched his head. “But one thing is bothering me. It’s correct...but not good.”

“Why can you not look them in the eye, Sakai-sama? Over.”

“Well, um.” Sakai toyed with the *inro* in his pocket and looked up into the air. “ ‘Musashi’-san, can you help me with something?”

The Non-Gods were shattered. When the Non-God Sword standing in front on the starboard side fell to its knees due to shattered legs...

“Herrlich!!”

The Schwarz Hexen’s bullet shook its upper body.

The piercing shot used the momentum of its great speed to slam into the ether body.

The dozens of blades made of light were all shaken by the Technohexen’s coin bullet.

“...!”

And they shattered in an instant.

The lightning and wind remained stormy in the night. But scattered blossoms of light danced above the deck like flower petals in the wind. They were the sign of a single victory.

“Hit!!”

And on the port side, the shrine maiden’s arrow shot through a type known as a Non-God Axe.

Each of the shots destroyed the “mold” core at the center of the stagnation.

The warriors would hold them in place and one of the main fighters would send in a destructive attack. That rotation was familiar: “It’s the same as the ‘supply carrying’! Don’t let it scare you!”

“Judge,” they all replied. And while those attacks continued to port and starboard...

“———!!”

The Non-Dragon Sword fought the Hidden Dragon in the center.

The two dragons were of contrasting white and black and they repeatedly clashed and roared.

However, the white wings rose up once the Non-Gods to the sides disappeared.

It did not last long, but with the newly opened space, the dragon tried to make a move.

The sword-shaped wings sliced through the wind and scattered lightning while flapping forcibly backwards.

“...!!”

The Non-Dragon Sword sent a deafening animal cry into the air and charged the Hidden Dragon.

They clashed.

All of the warriors saw the Non-Dragon Sword score a hit.

At the same time, the four people on the open-air bridge (minus Kimi) took action.

The Weiss Hexen and Schwarz Hexen had confirmed the destruction of the

Non-Gods on either side of the ship. Seeing safe airspace there, they flew into the sky to port and starboard to support the warriors.

Asama descended the tiered seating and hurried to manage everyone's defenses.

And Mitotsudaira descended to the deck where she viewed the battlefield, sent new commands via sign frame, and raised her voice.

"Everyone, set the Chancellor as your target!"

She raised her eyebrows, clenched her teeth just once, and ran forward.

"Stop the Chancellor. That is the objective of this attack!"

Mitotsudaira sensed bitterness inside her as she said that.

If she was being honest, she felt they should view the Chancellor as an *enemy*.

...Because she's summoning and strengthening the enemy forces.

But that girl was extracting the stagnation. Her song and dance had to continue until the stagnation was fully extracted.

The Chancellor had merely taken their task and done it all at once.

But, thought Mitotsudaira.

...Isn't this strange?

Why was the Chancellor doing this?

One analysis suggested the Chancellor's group saw this as a show of force.

Since this battle was being fought in the sky above Aki, it would go down in the records of the other nations. The barrier created by the Non-Gods separated them from the outside world, but everything happening inside was visible and impossible to keep hidden.

But that meant the other nations would know what Musashi could do.

That would likely lead to stricter rules and more caution, but there were some things they could get away with once they had proven their strength. It would likely open up more options than it restricted.

But, thought Mitotsudaira as she jumped over the broken audience seating.

While it was more impressive to defeat all 8 Non-Gods at once, why hadn't the Chancellor simply suggested that when they were planning this?

At the very least, they could not have refused an order from the Chancellor.

So why had she created this situation?

"Why...?"

Mitotsudaira muttered that word while dashing across the deck.

Ahead of her, the Non-Dragon Sword clashed with the Hidden Dragon and everyone cheered.

"...Eh?"

A thought occurred to her when she saw the Hidden Dragon shake so much from the impact: *Aren't the Hidden Dragon and Non-Gods being supported by the Chancellor's song and dance?*

...What is this?

Mitotsudaira's previous thought carried a disconcerting and unpleasant feeling about what was to come.

And she suddenly looked back toward the port stern.

Everyone from Class 2-Plum was behind the tiered seating there. Persona-kun and Urquiaga were out front for defense, but behind them all were Suzu and...

...My king!

She was relieved to see he was safe, but the bad feeling did not immediately leave her.

That was because her king was looking forward with a frown.

He was looking past the Non-Dragon Sword and Hidden Dragon to view the half-destroyed stage.

The Chancellor was dancing there.

The Non-God wind raged and lightning sparks scattered, but Mitotsudaira

could still see her there.

She saw a single dancing figure.

Could she see it because a Non-God had been destroyed to port and starboard?

“No, this is...”

It was odd.

Mitotsudaira could only see the Chancellor in the distant darkness. Even though the girl did not have an illumination spell spotlight shining on her.

“Nate!”

She was already halfway across the deck, but her king’s voice reached her.

“Stop her!!”

The instruction and its contents were unexpected, but she still reacted on reflex.

And just then, she saw something.

The Non-Dragon Sword moved after crashing into the Hidden Dragon.

But it was not pulling back from the tackle. This was not a victorious action.

It shook its long neck and collapsed back toward Mitotsudaira.

“...Eh!?”

The Non-Dragon Sword had been attacked.

After joining the others to starboard and running toward the front line, Tenzou saw *that*.

In the air a bit off the deck, the Non-Dragon Sword collapsed backwards.

No, that was not it.

“It was knocked back by something!?”

What power was great enough to move such a large dragon?

He had not seen a dragon cannon or anything like it. And hadn’t the dragon

been making a tackle?

But beyond the hit dragon, he saw something on the deck: the Hidden Dragon.

Except he only saw the head.

Its entire body was breaking apart into light.

It was already dead.

However, the Non-Dragon Sword's charge had not shattered the Hidden Dragon's body.

It was an arm.

A giant but delicate female arm had pierced through the Hidden Dragon's body from behind.

The arm had been sent out as a counterattack to the Non-Dragon Sword's charge. However...

"What is that arm?"

The female arm was made of ether and large enough to embrace a dragon. It extended from the stage and moved while accepting the lightning sparks and deck materials like raindrops.

It seemed to be seeking the Non-Gods on the starboard side from behind.

And an identical bluish-white ether arm did the same to port.

"———!!"

Each arm destroyed a Non-God.

Oddly, there was no noise. The light simply shattered, but even the glowing fragments were...

...Consumed!?

Then Tenzou realized the female arms extending from the dark stage matched the movements of the dancing Chancellor.

He knew what this was.

It was a technique only possible for the high-level servant of a god.

“A god summoning...!”

You summoned your god and had it reside in you as its vessel.

Torii was an Ootsubaki shrine maiden, so she would summon a god of song and dance. However...

...She summoned a false god created by the extracted stagnation!

A moment later, the Non-Dragon Sword crashed into the deck.

A heavy sound shook the air and the deck.

The next thing he knew, a giant opened hand was approaching them from the deck.

“Kh...!”

However, it ignored them.

The bluish-white female arm grabbed the Non-God they were fighting.

With the sound of someone kneading sand, the Non-God shattered into light.

The same happened to port, so there were no enemies left.

All that remained were the two female arms pulling back toward the stage as if to embrace Torii’s dancing form.

“Everyone, retreat!!”

Something activated just as Tenzou shouted that command.

The 8 storage devices exploded below the deck and pillars of ether lightning rose into the sky.

The 8 pillars of lightning fused with the lightning emitted from the Musashi. They all drew sharp curves to approach the half-destroyed deck.

There were hands there.

The two raised hands sought the sky like a giant oak tree.

The lightning wrapped around the two bluish-white arms like chains.

After that, they pulsed.

The arms copied Torii's movements.

Their movements were accurate. Their curves cut smoothly through the air and did not even waver when they came to a stop.

And all of Torii's movements were linked: the swinging of her arms, the spinning of her body, the raising of her head, and everything else.

With each of those movements, more than just the arms were created.

It was a false god of dance.

With the exception of a face, the upper body was created down to below the navel.

"————"

The false god turned to face everyone.

It had no face, but it was clearly smiling. It gave off that sense from a few dozen meters above the deck.

At the same time, the faceless god sang.

Its song was a roar.

With no mouth, its song had no sound or lyrics.

The song came from the intensity of its very presence.

It was an explosive blast great enough to bend the deck.

Everyone fell back and raised their shields in preparation.

Mitotsudaira stood in the lead with a defense spell raised and she yelled to the others.

"Fall back further!!"

But their actions were too little, too late.

Several hundred people were instantly hit and sent flying in a fan-like shape.

They did not even have a chance to breathe.

No one now stood on the large deck that had been a battlefield just a moment ago.

Only the false god slowly twirled while creating its body. The paths of its bluish-white arms were not decorated by wind like the Non-Gods used. Lightning instead wrapped around them.


“—————”

The false god blasted the night air with a song of victory.

Chapter 17: Destroyer on Stage

第十七章

『舞台の破壊者』



あれ？
いいんですよね？
やっちゃって
配点（今回は！）

Huh?

It's okay

If I do it, right?

Point Allocation (Just This Once!)

“Not bad. ...That’s a high-level Ootsubaki for you.”

Kimi crossed her arms on the open-air bridge to the stern of the Fushimi Castle.

Even in that elevated position, the woman she saw ahead of her was far taller.

The lightning attacks from the Musashi had ended and things actually felt peaceful aboard the Fushimi Castle.

But what they could see there was abnormal.

...She extracted all the stagnation at once with a god summoning.

The plan had been to summon the Non-Gods one at a time and perform the extraction in phases, but Torii had summoned them all at once and even performed a god summoning to ensure no traces remained.

Even if it was a false god, summoning a god required a massive amount of ether, a large festival, and a high-level worshiper of the entertainer god.

The Gagaku Festival had been the perfect festival for Torii to use.

She could not have performed the god summoning on her own, but the Gagaku Festival and stagnation extraction had been set up for her.

Since it was a stagnation, that false god had to be destroyed. However...

“What should we do? This is on another level than a Non-God.”

“Judge,” agreed “Musashino” while controlling the ship. “Simply destroying the outer shell will likely require an attack from weapon on the same level: a divine weapon. Over.”

That would indeed be necessary, but there were no divine weapons there.

The Technohexen brooms were divine-level mobility systems, but the cannon system was no more than strengthened Technohexen spells.

Asama was a mid-level shrine maiden, so she could only use normal bows.

None of the attacks available here had the ether divine protections or power of a divine weapon. And even if there was one, a simple enchantment on a personal sword or spear was unlikely to pass through the false god's outer shell.

"And to defeat that..."

It was obvious at a glance.

There was a figure inside the false god's chest.

That was Torii who acted as its vessel.

She looked asleep and her arms and legs were lightly spread.

That false god acted belligerently because it was a stagnation, but it also mimicked Torii's dance and movements.

So they only had to attack the vessel.

The false god was reliant on the vessel, so doing that would cause it to shatter and self-destruct.

However, that would likely kill Torii.

"But there is someone who can do that."

Kimi spoke that person's name.

"Suzuki Magoichi. She wields the divine weapons named Yatagarasu and her history recreation has her slaying Torii Mototada."

Just as she said that, the false god moved.

It swung its arms and then its entire body.

"...!"

With an explosive blast, lightning scattered from its arms.

Masazumi searched for Suzuki with racing lightning and sparks behind her.

...Where is she!?

Masazumi had no idea why she was doing this.

Did she want the girl to slay Torii here?

Or did she want to tell her not to do it?

She did not know.

But if she did nothing, Suzuki was bound to slay Torii.

That was written in the Testament. And Suzuki was the only one who could slay Torii on the intense battlefield the Fushimi Castle had become. Also...

“The world is in motion right now!”

It was the history recreation.

What did Masazumi want to do with those two words?

She did not know. She did not know, but she was searching for Suzuki. She had checked the deck, the audience seating, and below deck.

She had run all around hoping to find the girl.

“...Damn!”

But that was not the point. The others could not act with the lightning rumbling behind them, but that was not the point.

“I’m not alone here!”

Yet she had set finding Suzuki as her goal without knowing what she could do on her own.

That was not enough.

But what else could she do?

Should she stop Suzuki or support her? Which was it?

...What should I do?

Just as she thought that...

“Hey, everyone, you got a second?”

She heard the idiot’s voice from the deck.

“Someone stop Chuuko. But do it as peacefully as you can, okay?”

Because...

“She’s definitely getting the guards called on her later, right? So there’s no point in getting ourselves all depressed now. Keep that in mind as you do this, everyone.”

You idiot, thought Masazumi.

...It isn’t that easy!

They did not have a divine weapon user. And yet everyone gave the same response: “Judge!!”

Kimi raised her head, shook her hair in the wind, and stared into the center of the lightning.

“Heh heh. Excellent decision, foolish brother!”

“Eh? For real!? How many points did I get!?”

“Out of a maximum of 10, you scored a 700! But all the excess points go to me.”

“Hold on, sis. In that case, I’ll give you my 10 points too! If you just had 690 points, you’d be a sub-700-point girl!”

That’s what I like to hear. But that really was an excellent decision.

...Yes.

We can no longer choose to lose anyone.

And to support that line of thinking, Kimi gave a shout.

“Tenzou! Magoichi – 10 seconds!”

Tenzou was already on the move.

After the false god blew him away, he had realized what Torii and Suzuki were after.

The divine mail he had received from Watanabe that morning had said the following: *...Suzuki Magoichi will shoot the Chancellor at the Gagaku Festival.*

It had not said to stop her.

But the person they saw as their leader had made a certain decision.

They would not lose anyone.

So Tenzou ran through a ship corridor. He had spoken with the automatons and checked the passage history data.

“Everyone! I know where Suzuki Magoichi has gone!”

He gave the answer.

“About 15 minutes ago, she left the Fushimi castle on a transport ship and is en route to a hub passenger ship to the mainland!”

Uqui: “Then she isn’t going to assassinate the Chancellor?”

10ZO: “It is too soon to say that!”

Watanabe’s statement had been clear. Musashi lived on negotiation and trade, so the 1st Special Duty Officer played a more important role than any direct fighting force. That was who this information had come from.

10ZO: “There must be a sniping system set up somewhere!”

But he did not know where.

It was also possible it did not exist.

Where was the divine weapon that would shoot Torii and establish the history recreation?

While running around the ship here, he had seen no sign of the Yatagarasu rifles anywhere.

“Kh...”

But, he thought.

...Watanabe-dono is a busty blonde!

She was set to become a wife, but he refused to believe the target of this faith could lie or be mistaken. So...

10ZO: “Does anyone know where those rifles are!?”

Masazumi felt her heart pound when she heard Crossunite’s voice.

And she hurried to the deck while parting the wreckage that had been the audience seating.

She looked up to the top of the tiered seating and saw the Aoi Sister and the crossdressing idiot.

“You two!”

Lightning raced by behind them. The light was painfully bright and the scattering wreckage revealed the shape of the wind.

But Masazumi still asked.

“Is there any way to stop Suzuki’s sniping!?”

“Probably?”

His answer was so incredible it rendered her speechless. But...

“And if you think so, then tell us what it is.”

“Y-y’know...”

She felt like she had lost a lot of her momentum, but she still responded.

She had seen Yatagarasu used once before.

Those rifles could be set up anywhere. After all...

“The sky!!”

Masazumi pointed her gloved right hand toward the heavens directly above her.

“Suzuki would have been cautious, so Yatagarasu will have been flying above the Fushimi Castle since last night!”

Magoichi viewed the Fushimi Castle and the dark clouds surrounding it.

The clouds looked black even to her night vision and rumbling thunder and

spraying ether light scattered from within.

“If I have to keep them at this much of a distance, I probably should have just held them myself.”

She caught occasional glimpses of the false god between the clouds.

The transport ship she rode was on the way to a hub passenger ship which would take her to the mainland. It was for the people who had enjoyed the Gagaku Festival partway through but had to get back to the mainland today.

But most of the passengers were gathered on the stern with her.

They were all worried about what was happening on the Fushimi Castle.

Most of them were European, so none of them were interested in a Far Eastern name inheritor like her. That allowed her to take a step back from them and close her eyes toward the false god visible in the distance.

“Yatagarasu.”

She knew this would change much and begin much.

Magoichi squeezed the trigger in her heart.

...This is the end.

In a way, both her relationship with Torii and Musashi’s relationship with the Testament Union would end here.

Musashi had proven it could repel Non-God-class foes in that battle.

And their Chancellor had proven she was powerful enough to perform a god summoning.

Both of those facts would make the other nations wary.

So she would perform the history recreation.

The Chancellor with that much power would take responsibility for the other nations’ caution by being “slain”.

That was what this was.

And by recreating the Battle of Fushimi Castle, the Far East would have cleared a history recreation from just before Sekigahara.

The European Testament Union nations that saw P.A. Oda as a threat would welcome a history recreation that allowed them to put pressure on Oda and Hashiba.

So even though Musashi had demonstrated external strength, they would have taken responsibility for it.

It was an unpleasant series of events, but Magoichi kind of understood why Torii had wanted it.

“The Apocalypse.”

It would not happen during her year, but during the next year, the nations would have to face that problem. Would the world be destroyed or not? The next year would be the final battle to see if there was any way of saving it.

Right now, the nations were working behind the scenes to work out deals related to the Apocalypse, but...

...That means they aren't going to hold back.

Small, weak nations would be lucky if they were simply seen as bait for the powerful nations. There would only be half a year between the start of the new school year and the Apocalypse in October. When the powerful nations were rushed by that conclusion, they could easily trample right over those weaker nations.

What happened now was crucial for determining whether or not that would happen to Musashi.

If they did this next year, the other nations would use it as an excuse to do who-knows-what to them.

So they would do it now.

And the residents of Musashi would use it to make a judgment.

They would use this battle to judge who could lead them in the coming year. They would determine which students could easily handle Non-God-class foes and they would support them.

So...

“I will fulfill my role.”

Magoichi sent Yatagarasu permission for an ether shot.

Adele saw a light in the sky.

She was only just getting up after being blown away by the false god's explosive attack. She and everyone around her had crashed into the seats while being pushed back to the front of the tiered seating, but...

...Tenzou-san went running inside the ship earlier.

He was tough. Or rather, he had definitely been injured somewhere.

But she knew why he had done that.

Masazumi had solved the mystery he presented and the answer was in the sky now.

The dark cloud barrier surrounding the Fushimi Castle was dissipating with the Non-Gods gone, but a white line pierced the center of that as it was fired diagonally to the ship.

It was aimed accurately at Torii within the false god.

High up in the sky, something was flying away to the east. That had to be Yatagarasu.

A skilled sniper would not miss their initial shot. As if to prove it, the shot flew toward Torii like a shooting star.

If they did not stop that high-speed shot, they would lose Torii.

But was there anyone here who could do that?

...There is!

Adele shouted their name.

“Asama-san!!”

“Asama!”

Asama was brought back to her senses by Adele’s voice and his voice in quick succession.

...Umm.

Because she had not been rushing too much and because she had prepared a defense spell, she had avoided a direct hit from the explosive blast on the deck.

Of course, she had still been hit.

...And it hit pretty hard...!

She had apparently only passed out for a moment. Once she realized she had fallen onto her butt, her body stood up before her mind had fully recovered.

She was unsteady on her feet, but standing had been the right thing to do. Her body wanted to keep going as someone who could handle this situation.

And when she looked up into the sky, she understood what that situation was.

“That’s...”

It was the line of a shot.

She immediately realized what it meant and that fully woke her up.

She recognized that shot. When fighting the Hidden Dragon, an identical shot had arrived from the distance to destroy the Hidden Dragon with the exact same timing as hers.

It was indeed Magoichi’s sniper shot, so...

“...!”

Her body moved.

She had to do something about this.

She could not let anyone be lost.

So she immediately prepared Kataume.

She aimed at Magoichi’s ether shot.

Could she do this?

Instead of aiming directly at the soaring shot, she aimed ahead of its path, just barely away from the false god.

She would not get a second chance at this, but she had a thought.

...I remember the destruction of that Hidden Dragon.

The Hidden Dragon shattered by their battle had been a collection of stagnation. But even if it was stagnation, Asama thought of it as a being with a temporary life.

So as a Shinto musician, she had wanted to purify it and free its “mold”.

But that sniper shot was different.

That spell could only destroy things as an enemy. Of course, Asama knew they had no purification spells outside of the Shinto cultural sphere and that spells like this were the mainstream in all nations except the Far East.

But this was Musashi of the Far East. And she was the Musashi Shinto Representative.

If she let something like this be destroyed instead of purified for a second time...

“Then why even have a Musashi Shinto Representative!?”

She felt no anger.

If she felt anything, it was a sense of duty. She would turn Musashi and her surroundings into a space where people could live in the Far Eastern way without even thinking about it. The attack she was about to launch was an extension and proof of that. So...

...Can I do it!?

She decided to erase that doubt from her mind.

Doubt would cloud her mind.

Then she could not hit.

But there was something like panic in her heart, time passed, and the white

line continued moving in her vision.

“Hey, Asama.”

Suddenly, she heard his voice in the distance.

“Is there nothing you can do?”

Was there nothing she could do?

Those words flattened out her mind as it began to fall into self-doubt.

“Honestly...!”

Now she had to do it. After all...

...Now everyone's focused on me!

“Really.”

She had no choice.

Part of her thought it might not be possible, but that idiot had left it in her hands while standing out like a sore thumb because he was either nude or crossdressing. She had come here as the Asama Shrine Representative, so she could not say it was impossible and she at least had to do whatever she could. *Yes, it's such a pain having people expect too much of you. Yes, I am definitely not just curious what happens if I snipe a sniper shot. Yes, Hanami, give 3 blessings to the targeting spell. That is a divine weapon's ether shot, so give 18 Blessings of ether divine protections to the tip. Yes, this really is a pain and I would rather not gamble on the Asama Shrine's reputation, but that idiot has let everyone know what he expects from me. Yes, I really have no choice. No choice at all. Heh heh heh.*

“Asama-san! Why do you look so delighted!?”

How rude. This is the Asama Shrine's duty.

“Hit!!”

The result was seen in an instant.

Magoichi looked west while walking to the bow of the transport ship.

“I see.”

She saw a light above the Fushimi Castle visible to the west in the night sky.

Her shot had been hit by a sniper shot from below.

...The Asama Shrine Representative did that, didn't she?

Magoichi had fired an ether sniper shot. An arrow fired by a mid-level shrine maiden would not have fully destroyed it. Instead, the arrow had shaken her shot and altered its trajectory.

Instead of piercing the false god and hitting Torii, it passed diagonally by and shattered the Fushimi Castle's bow.

The ship's bow would be entirely unrecognizable now. Without careful control of the ship, it would tilt to stern.

“But...she did well.”

The shrine maiden had intercepted a rifle shot.

That was theoretically possible, but how much had she trained to pull it off on the battlefield?

“My mistake may have been letting her see one of my shots in advance.”

Had she been able to predict the trajectory and idiosyncrasies due to that? Or had she done it on pure momentum? Maybe both. But...

“—————”

Magoichi analyzed the feelings inside her and identified them as frustration and relief.

She looked up to see three things flying in the sky.

They were Yatagarasu.

The three bird rifles looked tired after flying so far, so she exposed her right shoulder to them. They almost seemed to collapse down onto it to rest and she accepted them while taking a step back.

“Well done.”

She then roughly spun them around once to adjust their position.

They felt heavy. Of course they did. They might have missed, but they had still fired on a person. And instead of firing haphazardly for defense or offense during a war, they had tried to take the life of someone she knew well.

Of course they felt heavy.

And she could not decide whether or not it was a good thing that that weight had proved meaningless.

They simply felt heavy.

And while that weight lightly shook her body, Magoichi looked to the west.

In that instant, she heard a roar there. It was the explosive pressure of the false god's song.

She raised her eyebrows at the reverberation that seemed to tear apart space itself.

"Now, I have to figure out what excuse to make about my history recreation... but what are you going to do, Musashi?"

The roar rang out and more flashes of lightning were born. Magoichi stared at that noise and light as she spoke.

"Let's see you slay that false god."

Chapter 18: Endorser of the Usual Garden

第十八章

『いつもの園の賛同者』



否定するでも＝
認めるでもなく
ただあればいいとする価値
配点（会いに行く）

Instead of rejecting

Or accepting it

You are simply glad it exists

Point Allocation (Go and Meet It)

“Musashino” heard the false god’s roar.

That explosive blast was released into the sky and nearly horizontally.

Was it protesting the failure to kill it? The way it bent back and swung its body forward again was a lot like a dance. The lightning launched by its striking hands swept across the deck and the surrounding air.

This produced wind.

But for “Musashino” something else was more concerning than the false god’s actions.

“The ship’s ether fuel is being absorbed. Over.”

“Eh? What!? It’s slurping down the ether!?”

“Heh heh. Silly foolish brother! It’s sucking up the ether! Isn’t that right, ‘Musashino’!?”

These siblings are even more of a nuisance when they are together.

But the ether fuel level was dropping quickly enough to reduce the power output. And she knew what was causing it.

“I have determined the false god requires ether to maintain its current form! Over!”

“Musashi” received a sign frame report from “Musashino”.

It contained a diagram of the Fushimi Castle and the Musashi.

...At this rate, the Fushimi Castle will fall toward the Musashi in another 318 seconds?

“Musashino” was asking if she should keep the ship horizontal or tilt it vertically so it could fall into the gap between the Musashi’s ships.

She must have decided there was no keeping the Fushimi Castle airborne.

But everyone rapidly put together two tentative plans for stopping the fall.

The first was to send the Fushimi Castle enough ether fuel to surpass what the false god could absorb.

However, that was determined to be nearly impossible since they lacked the time and means to transport the ether fuel.

That left the second plan. Those on the Musashi could not reach the Fushimi Castle in time to help, but...

“Sakai-sama, what is it they would need to slay a false god? Over.”

“A divine weapon, right?”

“What about yours?”

“Mine is pseudo-divine, so it wouldn’t really work. It’s for mobility.”

“Thank you very much for being no help whatsoever. Over.”

“Now, now.” Sakai smiled bitterly. “There have to be others, so let’s try a little harder, ‘Musashi’-san. Also, there are some things we need to deal with here. First and foremost...”

A rumbling arrived from directly overhead and far closer than before.

“Isn’t there more lightning overhead now?”

“Musashino” saw a new power in her vision.

The false god now held weapons.

After consuming the Non-Gods, the lightning emitted from its hands had formed a pair of hammers.

They were lightning hammers.

Also, the false god stood on a pair of legs and something spread from below its feet.

“Is it spreading its influence!? Over.”

It was intervening in the ley lines to create a space in which it could exist.

It was trying to stagnate the newly-tuned ley lines around the Musashi. At the Non-God level, it would use up too much of their own energy and they would be destroyed in the process, but this false god was different. It was a collection of all the stagnation. Even if it disappeared, a clear “stain” would remain on the Musashi.

And if that happened, calculated “Musashino”.

The result was immediately reached by the calculations of several automatons.

“A mysterious phenomenon production area with a diameter of about 50 meters would remain directly over the Musashi!”

She did not end that with “over”. She had more to say.

“Asama Shrine Representative! You are in control here, so please provide a plan.”

Because...

“If the false god is not slain within two-and-a-half minutes, I will have this ship self-destruct. That is the best plan to keep the stagnation’s spread to a minimum! Over.”

“Understood.”

That response came from the lightning-covered deck. The Asama Shrine Representative fired an arrow on a Non-God while speaking.

“So we have a whole two-and-a-half minutes to work with, do we?”

“———”

“Musashino” was left speechless.

...*Truly*...

I do not understand humans.

The best plan was to self-destruct the ship after two-and-a-half minutes. Trying anything else before then would not be the best. Which is why she had said what she did, but...

...Why do humans interpret things in such selfish ways?

But an interpretation was no more than an interpretation. And as if to prove it...

“...!? I am detecting an ether fluctuation around the false god! It is-...”

The explosive blasts and lightning attacks were being duplicated. The pair of lightning hammers amplified the attacks to an even greater scope than before.

Thunder was said to be the cry of a god. With these strikes, the false god sent precisely that to the humans.

The dancing movements continued and it attacked with the lightning hammers as if playing a game.

Some of the god’s twin attacks got through and some did not.

Asama prepared a defense barrier in expectation of some direct hits and then she saw it.

A giant form leaped forward over their heads.

It was the Non-Dragon Sword.

That white sword was hit by the lightning attacks and struck by the explosive blasts from the hammers.

“...!!”

But the dragon continued its charge and hit the false god with a roar.

...A dragon cannon!!

It had not used that white dragon light during the earlier battle against the Hidden Dragon. The Non-Dragon Sword must have been worn down, so it had finally used the one attack it had held in reserve.

“—————!!”

But Asama saw that the Non-Dragon Sword had not targeted the false god's body.

Instead of going for the weak point where Torii was, the dragon cannon tore into its right leg.

The false god attempted to dodge.

But it had just released an explosive blast. That forcible action would not work as a dance. It made a large, gentle movement, but the beast's movements surpassed that.

The right leg shattered into light.

A moment later, the Non-Dragon Sword received a direct hit from the lightning and explosive blasts.

The hits from the twin hammers shook the night with the explosive sounds of lightning and pressure.

The impact caused the giant form to swell out, and...

"Non-Dragon Sword...!"

While calling out to it, Asama thought, *This dragon was definitely on our side.*

It had been born because of the stagnation, but it must have been born with the Musashi's proper ether at its foundation.

But, she added in her heart.

...Why didn't it shoot Torii-san?

That almost made it seem like the dragon knew what they wanted.

But the current situation was more important than her questions.

The Non-Dragon Sword had blocked multiple explosions from the enemy. It could not cover the port and starboard sides and those had broken, but the white dragon had stood up a bit on its hind legs and spread its front legs and wings to catch as much of the blasts as possible.

And the dragon shattered.

The white light, the sword-like texture – everything.

The Non-Dragon Sword broke apart without even roaring.

Asama clapped her hands toward it.

“Thank you very much.”

That had to be Musashi’s dragon.

The ley lines were closely connected to the people who lived there, the history of the land, and the time spent there. That Non-Dragon Sword had been born from Musashi’s ley lines, so it must have seen all of that and acted accordingly. However...

...Eh?

Asama realized the dragon had taken one final action.

It had turned its head toward the open-air bridge behind it.

Someone stood there.

...Toori-kun?

“Hey.”

He raised a hand toward the dragon.

“I don’t really get it, but thanks.”

And...

“You’re something of Musashi’s right? Then if you ever have another chance, help us out, okay?”

...What is he even saying!?

Her nerves would give out if such a rare being just kept showing up.

But she also saw the dragon’s expression change. The sensory portion that functioned as eyes definitely narrowed.

“———!!”

And it gave a roar as it broke apart.

They had been protected.

Protected by a being that risked everything to do so.

“Yes.”

That fact directed Asama’s attention forward once more.

A false god of lightning attacks stood before her. Superheated ether spread from it like a lake and it sent power their way.

But the false god did not step forward. That was thanks to losing its right leg.

The knee and lower leg were still there and they remained spatially connected to the hip, but this false god used the “mold” of an entertainer god. If it could not dance, then each of its movements would reject its very purpose and it would fall apart.

Thus, the false god danced with just its upper body while letting its leg recover. It swung the lightning hammers, swayed its body, threw lightning at them, and explosively sang.

“———!!”

The Fushimi Castle’s deck became the false god’s stage. And...

“Two more minutes!! Over.”

What do I do? wondered Asama.

What she lacked was strength.

She did have the willpower.

She just needed the strength to act on it. But that was why she had companions. So to start with...

“Mito!” called Asama.

Someone lay collapsed on the bow of the deck after being hit by the false god’s initial attack.

It was Mitotsudaira.

She had taken a nearly direct hit from the explosive blast and that had knocked her face down on the deck. Asama had thought her defense spell had just barely activated in time, but...

“Mito!”

She could reach the false god from that position.

Adele began to move forward.

The wreckage that had once been the audience seating was spread out in front of them. The only people beyond that were Asama, Naito and Naruze in the sky to port and starboard, and Mitotsudaira who lay collapsed in the distance.

“I need to get out there.”

But what could she do there?

She had no weapons and this opponent could shatter their defense barriers in a single hit.

Even if they attacked as a group, those explosive blasts would nullify their superior numbers. And yet...

Mar-Ga: “We’re in, Asama. We’re with you on this.”

Rapid-fire shots began to fly toward the false god from the port and starboard sky.

It was the Technohexen. Their Weiss Hexen and Schwarz Hexen classmates were prepared to support the front line on their own.

Gold Mar: “Everyone, if it gets too tough, you should withdraw. Ga-chan and I can pick up two each, but not any more than that.”

Adele had a thought about that.

...*Wow.*

She sighed and started forward.

It was nighttime and she caught occasional glimpses of that sky beyond the lightning. The thunder was loud and the situation could hardly have been worse, but...

“What good is a vassal who can’t act as a shield, right?”

Those words placed a smile on the corners of her lips.

“Fine, then,” she said.

She had once charged at and been sent flying by the Non-God Sword and Hidden Dragon.

So she realized something.

“A vassal’s job is to be sent flying!”

“I’m not sure that’s what a shield’s supposed to do.”

She ignored the rational critique from behind her. And...

“Knight Rank 1!”

The vassal shouted to the knight collapsed near the false god.

Adele knew that girl had given a quick instruction just before the blast hit. She had urged everyone else to withdraw and defend while she moved forward to act as a shield.

That had saved everyone else.

But it was wrong. It was shameful for a vassal to be protected by a knight.

Adele wanted an opportunity.

An opportunity to redo it. A chance to support the knight’s charge. And to get it...

“Knight Rank 1!”

Adele raised her voice while viewing the racing lightning and Mitotsudaira’s defense barriers that were automatically defending her and shattering.

“What are our orders!?”

She did receive a response.

But not in Mitotsudaira’s voice. It did not come from her at all.

It was a trio of barks. It was the Cerberus’s cry.

Mitotsudaira came to.

She had heard the same thing she had woken up to for the past several mornings: a trio of quiet barks.

...The Cerberus?

That was exactly it. However...

“———!?”

Once she sensed the situation around her, she slowly got up from her face-down position.

She faced forward and saw a false god with a shattered right leg.

The battlefield had become a wasteland of racing lightning. Her immediate surroundings were only preserved by the automatic defense barriers supplied by Asama, but the approaching lightning was shattering those as well.

...Is this what I think it is?

She understood the situation: the battle was ongoing, the enemy was powerful, and she was on the front line.

“...Ah.”

She tried to stand up but failed.

Her body slumped to the left and she rolled onto her side.

She could guess she had been hit by an explosive blast which must have shaken her inner ear.

She figured she was too shaky to stand.

...No, that isn't it.

She did not know what to do.

They were up against a powerful foe and the situation was pressing. She might have the willpower to fight, but she lacked a weapon. Adele was asking for orders behind her, but...

...There is nothing we can do like this!

And just as she wondered what to do...

“...!”

She heard some barking.

Her collapsed vision saw the small Cerberus's back.

The creature's tail was raised to make herself seem bigger as she barked at the false god.

She refused to back down.

The bristling of the fur made it clear she was afraid.

But the Cerberus would not back down.

...That girl...

Asama and the others had said the Cerberus was made from the "mold" of some part of Mitotsudaira's emotions.

In that case, what emotion was sending that small creature after the enemy?

Courage? No. This is pure recklessness.

Pride then? No, not that. She isn't hiding her bristling fur.

Then a protective love? No, not that either. She isn't viewing the target of her protection.

In that case, this had to be a foolish emotion.

...Yes.

Even if it was reckless and even if she was afraid, she would do everything she could to approach and reject the enemy.

"This is..."

Just before she finished that thought, the false god turned to face the Cerberus. Its swinging right arm brought lightning and a giant hammer attack.

"...!"

Adele saw the knight move.

...Watch out!

The knight had forcibly moved herself to save the Cerberus.

She moved forward. She took a shaky but definite step and picked up the Cerberus.

Even though a lightning hammer larger than her was descending overhead.

The action was reckless and filled with the trembling of fear, but she gave no thought to her own safety.

“Extra Special Duty Officer...!”

Without warning, she shot up into the air while holding and protecting the Cerberus.

But this was not from a lightning strike. The Extra Special Duty Officer had been launched by something that flew in from behind.

...Was that...

“An arrow!?”

It was. Asama waved from the deck in front of Adele while Kataume automatically restrung its bowstring.

It was a rough method, but it had protected the knight.

The action taken by their commander, the Knight Rank 1, could be described as foolish.

But Adele knew what to call the emotion that led her to recklessly have her way here.

“Justice...!”

Mitotsudaira embraced her justice.

Be reckless.

Reject not your fear.

Think not of your own safety.

It was all identical to something she had once been shown.

Someone had tried to protect her even though it was clearly reckless and the result had proven it. What he had shown her still existed within her.

So she trusted in it.

She trusted that she was supported by the justice within her. Thus...

“My king!”

The hammer was raised once more and lightning raced after her.

She did not care. Confident she would be given something to do, she raised her voice without even looking back.

“My king! ...Give me strength!”

“Sure, sure. I put in a request earlier.”

...I'd prefer it if you sounded more serious!

But *that* arrived.

It pierced the heavens above, shattered the lightning, and stood tall before her. She recognized it.

“Sensei's sword!?”

“Makiko-san, should you really have lent that to them?”

“Yeah, it is a bit dangerous for kids, so I made sure to lock it in the scabbard. But it is an IZUMO prototype, so it works against ether targets. But more importantly...”

Oriotri gave Sakai a look that said “look to the side”, so he turned to his right.

“ ‘Musashi’-san...why are you looking up in the air? Are you mad?”

“No, I am simply worried about the outcome of the gravitational launch. Over.”

“Oh, yeah. That was really impressive. Was it your first time launching something so big?”

Hearing that, “Musashi” slowly turned her eyes toward him.

Then she nodded and spoke.

“It was. Did it really look that impressive? Over.”

Mitotsudaira held a sword as tall as she was.

She placed the Cerberus on her head and raised the sword in both hands.

...It's pretty heavy.

Oriotri must have used her balance to swing it around. Although Mitotsudaira would have to use her strength to do it.

“To swordfight, I need to practice how to move it quickly and lightly.”

She sighed and viewed the ether light slowly rising from the scabbard.

The scabbard was locked in place, but that did not matter. Just as a shield attack could shatter a Non-God, if the sword was capable of ether attacks, she could use the impact of the scabbard as an attack. And destroying the false god with a wider surface would be more convenient than a slash anyway.

Her mission was to shatter the false god's left leg. However...

“...!”

The multiple lightning strikes were dense. Plus, the false god seemed to slowly look up at the sky a few times.

It was likely preparing another explosive blast from the lightning hammers.

In that case, thought Mitotsudaira While getting a feel for the sword by smashing the lightning, the silver wolf voiced what it was she lacked.

“Vassal Unit! Suppress the false god's lightning! And Tomo!”

She had to stop there.

Multiple gusts of wind were approaching her.

The false god was using the same attacks the Non-Gods had.

They came from dead ahead.

She could smash the racing slashes of wind with the sword, but once a few of them had passed behind her...

“Tomo! Do you have a divine weapon capable of piercing the false god's 'mold'!?”

Mitotsudaira looked over her shoulder and saw Asama frantically shaking her head about 120 meters behind her.

Asama held a bow named Kataume, but it was not a divine weapon.

There was no appropriate equipment for Asama. So...

...I have to destroy the entire thing myself!?

“Well, I think I can manage as long as I have 5 minutes or so of support from the others...”

“1 more minute! Over!”

Silver Wolf: “...Eh!? What does that mean!?”

Gold Mar: “Yeah, ‘Musashi’ was getting us all worked up while you were out cold, Mito-tsan.”

Mar-Ga: “Okay, Mitotsudaira, can you destroy that false god in 1 minute? My money is on needing to pick you up and fly away to safety.”

Silver Wolf: “Don’t give up so quickly! She is giving up too quickly, right!?”

Asama: “Y-yes, it’ll be fine! Wait just a moment. Toori-kun asked my dad for a new weapon for me and Masa is launching it!”

Just as Asama said that, a straight line of cloud stretched through the sky.

“Is that it?”

Mitotsudaira blocked the wind slashes as she looked up.

Smoking Girl: “It was a bit big and the warehouse was nearby, so I used a god of war launcher. I hope you’re ready to catch it, Asama-chi.”

“I am,” replied Asama. She spread her arms so she could grab it as soon as it fell in front of her.

And fall it did.

In an instant, a solid sound dropped down with enough force to partially embed itself in the deck.

It was a transport case that resembled a 3m spike. It was white with the

Shirasago Enterprises emblem and Asama Shrine logo in red. Also...

“High-level...!?”

Asama was only mid-level, so she must have been given special authorization for this. There was indeed a sign frame by her hands that said something about a user contract.

It was a divine weapon.

It had reached them, but Mitotsudaira still shouted out.

“It’s right behind me!”

It was easily more than 120 meters away from Asama.

Smoking Girl: “Wait, you didn’t want it at the same location ‘Musashi’ used?”

Silver Wolf: “That was my location on the front line! And if I hadn’t moved forward a bit, it would’ve squashed me!”

Smoking Girl: “Oh, whoops. Well, figure something out, okay?”

Mitotsudaira hurriedly threw the transport case.

“Here I go!”

She threw it, but it immediately burst open and split in two.

“...Eh!?”

There were two things inside. As far as she could tell, it was a bow and glove set and a binder set that resembled a closed fan.

They flew nicely since they were lighter than they looked, but...

Asama: “Eh!? Wait, they aren’t even close to reaching me! Mito, did you even try to throw them!?”

Marube-ya: “Are you sure that’s the problem here?”

Smoking Girl: “It was supposed to open from the impact of landing, but the timing must have been off.”

The two contained sets split to the left and right as they flew through the air.

They fell to port and starboard. Unfortunately, they were about 100 meters away from Asama.

Not only had they failed to reach her, they had split up, making them much harder to collect. Also...

“The false god!!”

The false god must have decided the two objects falling from the sky were a threat.

It swung its twin hammers to send out multiple wind slashes and spread destruction.

...Not good!

“Didn’t you learn in elementary school not to hit and kick people’s belongings!?”

Bell: “A-are you allowed...to use your feet to...stack up buckets?”

Boys: “Absolutely!!”

I think this line is open to too many people.

But Asama’s weapons had fallen and the false god’s slashes were headed that way.

“...!?”

Mitotsudaira saw an optical illusion.

It looked a lot like the two parts of Asama’s falling weapon had run horizontally just before touching the deck.

No, that was no illusion.

The two divine weapon sets were definitely being carried.

Two people were running at top speed with that luggage raised over their heads.

“Aki’s track team...!?”

“Indeed!”

Two people ran across the damaged deck. They wore shorts and shirts emblazoned with the emblem of Aki’s track team. One wore spikes and the other was barefoot.

“Hey, barefoot boy! Don’t your feet hurt!?”

“And aren’t your spikes bouncing off the damaged deck!?”

With one to port and one to starboard, they each carried their item and exchanged a glance. They gave each other toothy grins and then looked up to the sky.

An Aki viewing ship floated directly above.

The two runners had seen the danger below and jumped down.

The people leaning out over the edge of the ship were Aki students. They were all the ones who had helped with the Non-God Sword the other day.

“We’re repaying our debt, Far East Musashi!”

The false god’s slashes pursued the two.

But they leaned forward...

“You’re on!”

...and dashed.

They lengthened each step and their leaning foreheads sliced through the wind.

“Hey! Captain!” shouted the barefoot one while looking at the slash pursuing from behind. “Give that one here and get hit by the attack behind me! You’ll be a hero for sure!”

“How about you get in the way when one’s about to hit me!?”

“No thanks, moron!”

“Well, I feel the same, imbecile!”

“Then,” they said together. “We’ll just have to lose them!”

With that, they leaned further forward and raised their hips.

They controlled the height of their hips with the swinging of their upper body and used the motion of their legs to keep their hips from rising too much.

As long as their hips did not rise too much, they could send the full power of their legs into the deck.

That way they could link up all of their movements.

The pumping of their arms supported the rising of their thighs and the lowering of their upper body slammed their kicking feet against the floor.

“...!”

They accelerated.

As if to prove each step was a noble thing, their stride continued to extend and their speed continued to grow.

“Hell yeah!” shouted the captain. “I look so damn cool right now!!”

“Then I look damn handsome right now!”

“When you’re barefoot? Not likely. You think you’ve got anything on someone like me who uses a pumice stone on his feet every evening?”

“Huh? How can you say that when you use a deodorizing insole?”

“Shut up.”

They continued bickering as...

“...”

They sped up.

They were no longer accelerating by just moving their bodies.

Instead of running, they were launching their bodies forward.

“Let’s go...!”

The two of them rapidly pulled away from the pursuing slashes.

They even passed the slashes that were flying up ahead of them. And as they cut by in front of those, they raised their voices in unison.

“We’ll show you what the Far East can do...!”

Adele gasped.

...The Far East!?

Aki was under provisional rule, so even if they were under K.P.A. Italia's protection, the Aki reservation belonged to the Far East.

They had been unable to use Aki's Noh Stage for the Gagaku Festival, so Aki had lost their chance to officially participate. The Far Easterners of Aki would have felt a need to respond to the Non-God Sword incident in some way.

So had their race along the deck been a way for them to say that line?

"And..."

Adele remembered those two using acceleration spells during the battle against the Non-God Sword.

But no longer. They likely had body reinforcement divine protections, but...

"Ohhhh...!"

They passed all of the false god's slashes with no acceleration spells. And...

"Gooooooooooooooooaaaaaaaal!!"

They dropped Asama's things on the deck as they passed her by.

The protective cases for Asama's equipment automatically opened and lifted up their contents at the same time as the two finalists were caught by the standing warriors.

There was lightning and there were explosions, but...

"...!"

Adele moved forward.

Mitotsudaira was up ahead as a knight, so she had to pave the way for her.

"Time to go!"

Her shout received an immediate reply.

“Judge!!”

Many voices sounded behind her and lined up alongside her.

...*Eh?*

The warriors, the vassals, and the 1st Special Duty Unit she would have understood, but...

“Everyone!?”

Everyone had lined up alongside Adele, including the students here as part of the audience and her own classmates.

“Ha ha ha,” laughed Itoken. “We can at least hold a shield, Adele-kun!”

Persona-kun nodded while holding four shields together.

Urquiaga, Noriki, and the others were there too.

“Um, where’s Suzu-san?”

“Here...!”

Adele heard a voice from behind her. That meant Suzu was not going to participate in the charge, so everyone looked back in relief.

Suzu wore her white dress and waved at them.

“Now, then.” Neshinbara lightly raised both arms and put on a troubled smile. “It would seem our princess has no intention of fleeing.”

No one accused him of having an overactive imagination. They simply nodded and spoke.

“Then I guess we’ve just gotta do this!”

They all moved after the knight in the lead. They stayed in step with each other and ran as best they could.

But they were not even looking to their enemy.

The false god was rapidly launching slashes and lightning straight ahead and to either side.

Naito and Naruze were fighting back against the lightning hammers being moved by its dancing.

They fired rapidly, so the sky to port and starboard was filled with bursting lightning, wind, and glowing spray.

Adele and the others wished they could help out there. It would help prevent them from being worn down from the sides before reaching Mitotsudaira.

However, the left and right attacks were thick and they had their hands full breaking through the attacks coming straight at them.

A series of attacks flew toward them.

“————!?”

But they were destroyed.

Tenzou saw something while he moved ahead of the faster ones and behind the slower ones to prevent their ranks from crumbling.

The enemy's slashes were disappearing from above the deck.

That wind power was still being launched, but it was not powerful enough to fly and instead scattered and broke apart as light.

...Who did that!?

It was not Naito and Naruze. Those two alone could not provide this much of a counterattack.

“Then...”

Tenzou looked horizontally out from the deck.

Countless figures were camouflaged in the darkness there.

They were Technohexen.

The more combat-oriented members of Musashi's delivery business were providing covering fire.

“Oh, hell. We're trying to show off the students' power, so what are those old ladies doing?”

Naruze's grumbling earned a response from the northern sky.

“All we’re doing is dealing with the lightning summoned by its hammers. The false god is the real target, so isn’t that what you two should be defeating, Zwei Fräulein?”

“That’s right. You’re ranked first in the delivery business and set to be our next representatives, so that has to be the stage meant for you today.”

“Maybe so,” sighed Naruze to Wild Kamelie and Marine. Just then, the false god moved.

Naruze knew what that movement was.

It was preparing to make twin hammer strike that would produce a wide-range lightning attack and an explosive blast.

“Here it comes! Fall back if you have weak anti-ether divine protections!”

As soon as the words were out of her mouth, the blast arrived.

There were two lightning hammer strikes, more lightning attacks, and a wide-range attack of voiceless sound pressure.

The false god’s striking voice would sweep everyone off of the deck.

But Naruze heard something as she took a defensive position.

...*Huh?*

She heard a voice while the twin hammers pulled back to strike the ship.

The false god’s pressure was singing in Torii’s style, albeit faintly.

“Just like *normal* and just like *always*.”

Was it *normalizing* that sweeping blast and rejection of all?

“Fall back!”

The song was heard beyond that shout.

“The night’s *usual* atmosphere.”

Was it trying to get rid of anything and everything?

“Gives me another push forward.”

The rejection of someone who had not been pushed forward howled in the

night as twin hammer blows.

Everyone braced themselves against the lightning hammer explosions created by the false god that sang as if crying.

“Power through it!”

But something struck the hammers before they could defend.

“Heh heh. Silly god. That song is much too dark. Here’s a real festival song.”

Kimi danced atop the open-air bridge.

“It will be abbreviated, but here I go: Early Morning Concerto.”

“How long have I been doing this?”

Kimi’s voice collided with the striking pressure. It was far quieter than the false god’s song, but...

“I’m always doing this on my own.”

“That’s right,” said Kimi. “Someone has been doing this on their own far longer than you have.”

But...

“Just like always and the same as usual.”

“That idiot does not let ‘the usual’ be ‘nothing’.”

Kimi’s dance and words caused something.

The hammers and their explosive blasts were stopped just before hitting.

The false god’s explosions and lightning were created from ether. And Kimi’s voice carried ether as a spell.

The two had collided.

They had not been negated. The song and dance merely found equilibrium.

Kimi had worked up a sweat.

...A high-level is really something.

She had stopped the false god, but she was being gradually pushed back. Even though this would have been enough to wrest control of the field away from a Non-God Sword.

If she continued to be pushed back, the equilibrium would collapse and she would be defeated. It was a dangerous situation.

“How – ev – er,” said Kimi. “False god? I recognize your dance.”

It was Torii’s dance. Torii was a high-level shrine maiden, so the movements were complex and intricate and a few points within it were deceptive. The trick was to make it look like one part of the body was moving but keep that part still while a different part moved.

It could look like the upper body was swaying when it was really just the hips and shoulders. It could look like you were leaning forward when you were really just raising your hips and tilting your head forward.

So it tricked the viewer. When they expected one movement from what they saw, a different movement would begin.

But Kimi had seen through it.

It was tricky because Torii was smaller than she was, so she had to make some corrections. But afterwards...

“I repeat the movements in the opposite order to take back control of this space.”

She reversed the dance, picked up speed, and raised her voice.

The false god could not use its leg, so Kimi’s dance was “superior”. Which meant...

“Break your rhythm...!”

The pressure gradually approached, but Kimi targeted the false god itself.

“...!”

It shattered as she watched.

Cracks ran through it and ether light scattered like blood. However...

...Oh, no.

She had been so focused on the dance that the pressure she had stopped overhead was now rapidly spreading.

“Wait, Kimi! Weren’t you going to stop it with the buffering of an affiliate shrine!?”

“You say that, Asama, but isn’t Ootsubaki stuff under your control on the Musashi?”

“Do I have to do everything for you!? And by letting it build up, the Spirit Bullet has only gotten bigger!”

“Asama-san! Please stop scaring everyone by inventing weird attack names for the enemy!”

Just as Adele shouted that, the overhead pressure completely suppressed Kimi’s voice.

Everyone below shouted and prepared to defend.

...What a pain.

Kimi sighed and pulled a microphone from her cleavage as she danced. And...

“Foolish brother!”

Asama looked to the aft stage while she hurriedly equipped herself.

Two idiots stood side by side there.

One was Kimi and the other was the crossdresser.

They were both dressed as shrine maidens and the crossdresser had giant fake breasts.

...And is that a wig with Kimi’s hair color?

The hair was somewhat straightened, but when had he prepared that? *Well, that’s his field, so I shouldn’t worry about it too much.*

But the two of them spoke in unison.

“Foolish brother, can you mimic my movements!?”

“I don’t think I can shake my butt like that.”

If that’s the only part he can’t do, I’m legitimately impressed, thought Asama before the two began to sing.

“I arrive just on time on my own.”

They were perfectly coordinated right from the get-go.

Both of them were mid-level musicians of an entertainer god. One of them was not enough for a high-level, but what about two of them?

The two of them produced a new pressure that stabbed into the approaching explosive pressure.

The false god danced in response. It produced a voice to amplify its vocal pressure: “My outstretched arms cannot reach the surrounding cage!”

That was a song of rejection.

What did that matter?

Kimi danced and sang.

“So let’s go. So let’s go.”

She matched her voice to her brother’s and she danced.

“Just like *always*, I gather my courage,” she sang, “open the door, and raise my voice.”

She took her brother’s hand, looked to Asama below, and shouted the song’s lyrics.

“I’m here to peep, Asama Shrine!!”

Asama felt herself blush.

...Couldn’t you sing the song I submitted as an offering?

But that was not entirely an option. Since she had been late to complete her own lyrics, they had chosen this song for her to sing at the Gagaku Festival. During their meeting, Kimi had smiled bitterly and said the following: “You

definitely need to aim for an encore with these lyrics. But anyway, this was the first song you chose for karaoke, so I think it is a good fit for you. Besides, if the Asama Shrine Representative sings it, it's sure to get people talking."

"I feel like we're turning into a comedy band..."

But when they had gathered at the Asama Shrine that one night, Naruze and Naito had paled when they heard the idea.

"No fair going for live jokes!"

So was that what this was? Regardless...

...If anyone was going to sing it, I wanted it to be me.

Did that mean she was turning into an entertainer? However...

"...Ah."

Light exploded in the sky. The false god's explosive blast had been pushed back by the two idiots' song and dance and the hammers had entirely shattered.

The great pressure returned to ether, became glowing dust, and fluttered down like snow.

"Charge...!"

Mitotsudaira led Adele and the others forward.

Mitotsudaira simply fulfilled her duty.

The lightning hammers had shattered in the sky and lightning crashed down from the fragments, so she slipped between the people being hit, defending against, or being blown away by it.

"...!"

She sent the sword along the most direct route to the false god's leg.

With a solid sound, the ether light emitted from the scabbard shined bright like the moon.

...!

Her nonhuman blood sent a tremor through her body.

And with the sound of breaking glass, the giant female ankle shattered.

Naito watched the scene while the fragments of wind attacks shattered around her.

She watched Asama.

That girl was probably the highest level of any of them.

Naito felt like she and Naruze had only just ascended to the same stage as her.

Of course, Asama probably thought nothing of the sort and, in time, Naito and Naruze would stop thinking of it like that.

But that girl had made a number of decisions about which direction she would take.

...Wow.

She was still mid-level, but she had finally received some high-level equipment.

She wore a giant glove with the kind of bow she had previously used inserted into the top and bottom.

The binder skirts on either side of her hips held her in place.

And there were two tail binders on the back of her hips to release *auspuff*.

She raised her bow toward the heavens and spoke over divine transmission in her usual calm voice.

“The Asama Shrine will now use its power to protect Musashi.”

She nocked a flat-tipped arrow to her bow and aimed it at the shattered and kneeling false god.

She intended to save that false god.

Asama secured herself in place.

The left and right binder skirts had already pierced anchoring sign frames that opened in midair and the picks on the side of her shoes had been driven into the deck.

The plastic soles were thick but supported her with a certain level of flexibility. Then she pushed her chest out a bit.

“Shirasago Enterprises prototype divine weapon: Umetsubaki Ver. 1.”

The two bows were attached to her glove.

She then pulled back the arrow along with the spell bowstring.

“Nn.”

She pulled the bowstring taut while she inhaled.

A targeting spell opened in a lens shape and automatically began rotating as it narrowed in on the false god.

...Here goes.

Asama squeezed and pulled on the glove’s grip.

That switch caused the bows’ armor to push forward.

“Gh...”

The tension quickly grew and the arrow shook. However...

...Bear with it!

“Hey, sis, isn’t Asama shaking?”

“Heh heh heh. Her boobs certainly are! Isn’t that right, Asama!?”

...Those two!

Hanami showed her a sign frame.

It displayed her worldly thoughts meter which was currently filled with red.

...Kwah!

“Does anyone have any purifying water or salt to help me focus!?”

“Of course we don’t. Has that shrine maiden gone mad?”

“Who knows,” replied Naito, but then she realized she could grant Asama’s request. “Asama-chi, you said water works, right?”

“Eh? You have some?”

“Um, yes.”

Naito reached into her inner suit pocket.

When changing into her Technohexen outfit, the items in her inner suit would be transferred over when the conditions were right. Because it would be a problem to close up her wallet and valuables in the phase space.

That said, Far Eastern and M.H.R.R. inner suits were different, so there was little corresponding space.

“Oh, you’re lucky. Here it is.”

It was contained in a chartula, so she placed it on Schwarz Fräulein’s launch line and shot it out.

“I just sent you some Blue Thunder ‘water’.”

After the “water” poured over Asama’s head and she regulated her breathing, the worldly thoughts meter lowered.

Apparently it really was water.

She stopped herself from wondering what that was about and faced the arrow instead.

Her hand was no longer trembling.

There was sweat on her brow, but she did not mind.

Her prosthetic left eye, Konoha, linked with the targeting spell. She gave permission to fire.

But as she stared straight at her target, she thought about the others.

She thought about what it meant for her to have made it here.

Their part of the Gagaku Festival had become a mess, but this was not the end.

...Yes.

It was the same as always.

But this isn't an obstacle, she thought Even if the false god was reaching out toward her...

"My outstretched arms," it sang, "cannot reach the surrounding cage!"

"Are you sure about that?" she said. "The usual will remain the same as always while also becoming something different. ...That is what I believe. That is what I can believe because I will continue onward with the others."

So...

"The night gives me another push forward."

She nodded at that lyric and finally gave her answer with the others.

"Hit!!"

An arrow wrapped in wind pierced the false god.

Light shattered, dodged, split, and danced.

"...!"

Only when they heard a cheer did everyone realize the Fushimi Castle had descended between Okutama and Musashino of Musashi's 8 ships.

"Musashino" looked around at the surrounding 8 ships and gave a quick bow.

"I ultimately held off on the self-destruction at two-and-a-half minutes. Because I determined it would work out somehow. Over."

Those words led to a cheer from the sky and all of the ships.

Those joyful voices signaled the end of the Gagaku Festival.

Chapter 19: Gifter at a Promised Place

第十九章

『約束現場の奢り者』



届けば良いと
そう思うことすら
昔はなくて
配点 (やって良かった)

In the past

I didn't even hope

It would reach you

Point Allocation (I'm Glad I Did It)

Torii awoke in a white room.

...Huh?

"I didn't expect the spirit world to look like an infirmary."

"No, you idiot."

When she turned her head to the side, she realized she was lying down.

She was on a bed with a blanket over her, and...

"Whoa, I'm naked! Wait, who are you calling an idiot, Tadayo? And, Suga too? What are all of you doing alive?"

Oosuga looked up from the light novel he was reading at the foot of the bed.

"To make a long story short, once I graduate, I'm headed to the surface to travel around with my teacher."

"You're running away after causing so much trouble!? Not that I actually know how much trouble it caused."

"I'm staying behind to help bring up our underclassmen, so I'm not too happy about that trouble, you moron." Tadayo sighed in a chair by the head of the bed. "Besides, I might have gone along with it up until the false god showed up, but once Suzuki failed, I worked on regaining control of the ship. I just about fell off the bow, so I made sure to get the ether fuel stopped."

"So you weren't willing to make yourself an enemy, huh?"

"I'm still supporting you, but I'm also a little angry."

Tadayo glared at Torii, but she also pressed on the girl's forehead to get her to lie back down.

"What are you doing, Tadayo?"

“Well,” said Tadayo. “For now, I’m telling you congratulations on completing your history recreation. You died.”

After a pause, Torii spoke to Tadayo.

“Pretty sure I’m still alive.”

“Not as a name inheritor, you’re not.”

You see.

“It seems the Testament Union decided it would be trouble to let us keep a name inheritor who could complete a god summoning. But...”

Tadayo lightly tapped Torii’s chest.

“According to the Asama Shrine Representative, your ‘mold’ was damaged enough to keep you from using spells for a while and, even once you recover, you’ll be back down at the low level.”

“Is that because I made myself a vessel for stagnation?”

“Don’t ask me,” said Tadayo while lifting her legs.

She rested both her feet on top of Torii.

“Ow, ow, ow, ow! Pinning me down in the nude!? You’re into some kinky stuff!”

“Shut up. Well, whatever the reasons or justifications are, you really have caused a lot of trouble this time. How are you going to explain yourself?”

“What is a festival without a little excitement?”

Oosuga smiled bitterly at that.

“Deep down, you’re probably far more of a poet than me.”

“Anyway, I don’t mean to change the subject...but where’s Nabe?”

“You know this is the Fushimi Castle’s medical room, right? With all that stagnation, everyone on the ship is under quarantine, so only the head of the Asama Shrine is allowed in or out as an inspector.”

Tadayo opened a sign frame displaying a divine transmission from Watanabe

with “we need to talk later” for the subject. Torii grimaced when she saw it.

But after a while, Torii threw her arms up over her head.

“So I can’t do anything anymore, huh?”

“You can still sing and dance, can’t you?”

“Yeah,” she said with a smile. And, “Huh?”

She heard music from the ceiling.

“What’s this? A second Gagaku Festival?”

“With a certain idiot making a mess of things at the end and the Asama Shrine Representative’s band unable to play with their instruments destroyed, anyone who wants to play was given the right to an encore. Everyone who can still play is performing when they feel like it.”

“What were the votes like before our performance? Who was at the top?”

“Oh.” Tadayo pointed toward the ceiling. “The Technohexen pair. Include the votes after that and it went to the Asama Shrine Representative, but her band didn’t even play.”

“I see,” said Torii.

“Torii, you need to talk with people more,” said Oosuga.

“I do talk with people.”

“Not what I meant,” he replied. “You need to say what it is you really think. ... Do that and I bet everyone will understand what you did today.”

“What if I don’t care if they understand?”

“Then why are you still alive?” Oosuga took a breath. “Everyone wants to hear from you. Before you graduate, you need to practice doing that, including how to let them know how powerless you are now. That’s your senior project.”

The half-destroyed stage was unusable, so they instead used the tiered seating below the open-air bridge.

They had simply added some scaffolding partway up, but the wall behind

them reflected the sound nicely.

Naito and Naruze were singing there in the light of illumination spells.

They had changed into their school uniforms, but...

“Kin kon kan kon...!”

They held hands and twirled around while singing the most requested song.

Some of the audience had removed their equipment and some had not, but they all sat on the badly damaged deck and ate a dinner comprised of the surviving stands’ products.

Time passed slowly there and the bonfires of the festival’s final night burned on the ships visible directly horizontal of the Fushimi Castle.

Everyone sighed as they occasionally waved at those lights and looked up at the fireworks.

“Honestly...” they said while singing along to the “kin kon kan kon” part. “The closing bell just never seems to ring.”

When most of them were taking a break, someone stood by the deserted half-destroyed stage.

“Okay.”

Mitotsudaira placed the Cerberus down on that raised part of the deck.

The small three-headed wolf looked up at her and tilted all three heads.

“...!”

The creature barked, but light enveloped her body.

That bluish-white light was occasionally scattering up into the sky.

The ether forming her body was breaking apart and disappearing.

Mitotsudaira crouched down and looked at the Cerberus.

...This girl...

She was Mitotsudaira’s justice.

Such a small and proud thing.

But the three heads seemed ignorant of the fact that she was disappearing. She stuck out three tongues as if waiting for some food.

So Mitotsudaira pulled three small treats from her shrine maiden outfit's hard point.

These were the last she had on hand.

She had more at home, but she was glad she had not calculated everything out to use them all up.

"Here."

Each of the heads bit at one of the bone-shaped treats.

The Cerberus must have been happy because the three pairs of eyes narrowed.

"Tomo."

"Yes?"

"Could we keep her from disappearing by continually giving her ether treats?"

"That would require an incredible amount since it would be supporting her very existence instead of just fueling a biological body. ...You would essentially have to submerge her in ether fuel."

"I see..."

Only the owner would like that, thought Mitotsudaira with a bitter smile.

But she was glad the creature was happy as she disappeared. And most importantly...

"I'm glad I came to understand you."

Because...

"I enjoyed being with you and it made me happy."

She picked up the Cerberus.

Kimi immediately began mock crying behind her.

“Oh, this is such a tragedy! Mitotsudaira doesn’t have any boobs to bury her in!”

“Why you...!”

Mitotsudaira felt a flash of anger, but Kimi may have been trying to keep her from feeling too sad.

However, the Cerberus was looking up at her from her arms.

Just as their eyes met, the three heads nodded. Or she thought they did. And...

“Ah.”

The light left her arms and rose into heaven.

...She’s gone.

Mitotsudaira was still looking up at the light ascending into the sky.

The bluish-white ether light was vanishing. Tears welled up in the corners of her eyes and threatened to spill out, so she held her breath, kept herself perfectly still, and held her own body. And then...

“...Eh?”

While staring up into the sky trying not to cry, she noticed something odd.

She felt like there was something in the arms wrapped around herself.

There was a definite weight in them.

She gasped while still looking upwards. This was an illusion. Her body was desperately trying not to forget what it felt like to hold the Cerberus.

“———!!”

She gasped again when she heard three barks.

She looked down toward her chest even though that let the tears fall.

There she was. The three-headed wolf was right there in her arms.

The small forelegs were tapping at her chest as if to complain she was

squeezing too tight.

...Eh?

“What does this mean?”

Mitotsudaira lifted up what she held.

This was real.

She held the exact same Cerberus in her hands and the creature was exposing its belly in resignation.

“Huh!?”

Mitotsudaira belatedly raised her voice and placed the Cerberus on the half-destroyed stage. That put the three-headed creature at her chest height.

“...”

The Cerberus sleepily stretched forward and yawned with all three heads at once. And then...

“Okay! Mito! I’ll register her, so let me see your hand!”

Asama tugged on Mitotsudaira’s right hand.

Asama rushed through the process in front of a noticeably bewildered Mitotsudaira.

She opened several Mouse-related sign frames and used her Asama Shrine Representative privileges to give approval.

She placed Mitotsudaira’s hand on the sign frames in a few places as a signature.

“Um, that should do it. ...Complete!”

“Clap!” said Hanami.

“Huh?” said Mitotsudaira. “Wh-what is going on!?”

“A good question, Mito!” Asama could feel the excitement of explaining Shinto matters rising within her. “I just registered the Asama Shrine’s first...no, probably Shinto’s first Cerberus Mouse!”

“Th-that doesn’t really answer my...um...what is going on!?”

Mitotsudaira pointed alternately between the night sky and the Cerberus going to sleep in front of her.

“She just disintegrated up into the sky, but then she was in my arms and now she’s going to sleep like this. So, um...”

“Calm down, Mito.”

Asama patted Mitotsudaira on the shoulder and held out a hand to surround the Cerberus in a torii-style cage.

“Basically, it means you looked after her properly.”

Mitotsudaira did not know what Asama meant.

She was unsure whether or not she could celebrate what had happened.

“Um, what do you mean I looked after her properly?”

“Well, you see.” Asama was in full-on Shinto explanation mode. “She was born when the stagnation and Musashi’s pure ether was shaped by the ‘mold’ of a local spirit and a portion of your emotions. Do you understand that much?”

Mitotsudaira did. But saying the wrong thing here would only encourage Asama’s Shinto explanation mode, so she simply nodded.

“Good, good,” said Asama. “But ‘molds’ can change. She might have started as a ‘mold’ of your motions and a local spirit, but your care allowed her to understand what she is and that made her ‘mold’ more like you.”

Meaning...

“Even if the Musashi leaves this airspace, her ‘mold’ will not be broken. Because her ‘mold’ is now more like you than the local spirit.”

“B-but.”

Mitotsudaira understood what that “mold” meant.

The change must have occurred during the previous battle. Mitotsudaira had come to understand the meaning of the “mold” and had taken action based on

it. So the Cerberus had fully accepted herself.

Of course, it was their brief life together that had built them up to that point.

This small justice had decided to look to her and join her. But...

“Why did she ascend into the sky just now?”

“That was probably just the stagnation portion.”

Mitotsudaira was dumbfounded by how casual Asama sounded.

...Is it really that simple!?

But Asama picked up the torii cage and held it up.

“Losing that much of its base ether has left her deficient as an ether life form, so it’s a good thing she didn’t try to hide or run away. I’ll preserve her, so we can replenish her ether and return her to normal. ...Oh, you’re okay with me looking after her until then, right?”

“I am. So, um...you can fix her?”

“Yes.” Asama nodded. “A spirit with a ‘mold’ is the same as a Mouse. I’ve already registered her, so she’ll be protected like a stray spirit. She’ll probably continue sleeping for a while, but I’ll make sure she’s running around again eventually.”

“H-how long will that take!?”

“I don’t know.” Asama kept her eyebrows flat. “She isn’t a Far Eastern spirit, she wasn’t created naturally, and she transformed herself for you. That balance has to be maintained, so I can’t say how much ether it will require. But...my guess is it will take 2 or 3 years.”

“I see...”

Mitotsudaira’s shoulders drooped.

Then tears dripped from her eyes and down her cheeks.

“Oh, dear,” said Kimi while wrapping her arms around Mitotsudaira’s shoulders and wiping the tears from her cheek. “Isn’t that great? Aren’t you glad we told you to look after it?”

“I am,” agreed Mitotsudaira. But then, “Wait, did you know this would happen?”

“Eh!? N-no, no!” insisted Asama. “I had no way of knowing this would happen. None at all! ...Besides, I didn’t want to get your hopes up just to have it not work out!”

Kimi laughed and Asama’s smile grew stiff.

But Kimi took the Cerberus cage from Asama and held it up in front of Mitotsudaira’s eyes.

“Is that really the point here? You have to say goodbye to this girl while she stays at the Asama Shrine for a while, so aren’t you glad you could give her a treat and watch over her as she went to sleep?”

Mitotsudaira had to agree. *Kimi always knows what to say*, she thought.

“Tomo, if you feel bad, then you can buy me something at a stand. Maybe a crepe.”

Hearing that, Kimi laughed, narrowed her eyes, and tossed something shiny to Asama.

It was two 500 yen coins. Asama caught them and nodded toward Mitotsudaira.

“I’ll be right back.”

“Now that I’m out here, there sure are a lot of stands.”

The stands had been lined up on the outer edge of the ship and the ones to aft had mostly survived.

There were people inside them calling out to gather customers, the lights were on, and sweet or savory smells wafted over from them as food was cooked in sugar or soy sauce.

...A lot happened today.

Oh, I need to stop by the Blue Thunder to thank P-01s for the “water”, thought Asama while viewing the stands.

...Um, where are the crepes?

Was it a bad thing to simply search for the example given to her? Since it was Mitotsudaira, part of her thought a meat dish might be better, but...

“Ah.”

She spotted the perfectly-ordinary Seventeen Articles of Ice Cream run by the Ohiroshiki family. It had originally been run by a couple who had trained at a major ice cream shop, but the Ohiroshiki family had bought it and expanded it. They had stopped by there in Murayama’s underground area before, but it looked like Ohiroshiki was not running it right now.

She walked into the light of the illumination spell below the stand’s hanging curtain.

“Excuse me. Do you serve crepes? My friend asked for one.”

“Sure thing. If it’s for Nate, do you want the yakiniku flavor?”

She just about agreed, but then she frantically faced forward to see who was beyond the counter.

“Toori-kun!?”

“Hey, great work out there.”

The naked apron boy pulled the crepe stove closer.

Asama asked a question while watching his skilled movements.

“What are you doing here?”

“Well, you see, I was thinking of starting some part-time work and the previous guy in charge is apparently quitting, so I was able to slide right on in here.”

The nudist pulled some pork from the refrigerator below the table.

“I guess I’ll start with the ginger pork.”

“Why are you actually cooking yakiniku?”

“Just because.” He looked around. “Umm, the meat is going to take a while to

cook, so it's going to be a wait. Also, your dad was here earlier."

She knew that. He was onboard as a quarantine inspector. She had not seen him yet, but given how much time had passed, he had likely finished his work and was probably viewing the encore performances.

...He'll be taking a break too.

Her father was always busy, so maybe he chose to visit places like this for a change of pace.

While she nodded at that thought, Toori suddenly spoke up.

"Want to eat something to pass the time? My treat."

"No, no. I can buy my own."

"It's fine. Really."

She could hardly say no to that, so she put the problem off until later and looked inside the counter.

That was when she realized what was there: ice cream.

Toori saw Asama briefly freeze in place.

He watched her for a few seconds without rushing her or asking her what flavor she wanted.

"Um, Toori-kun," she said while viewing the buckets in the counter. "Which is the white one with thin black specks inside?"

"That explanation sounds like something from a horror story, but is it the cookies and cream?"

"Which is that?"

"This one."

He pointed and Asama placed a hand on her cheek.

"That doesn't look quite right..."

"Then is it this one?"

He pointed at the rum raisin.

Asama's gaze stopped on it and she crouched down.

"That looks a lot like the previous one. What is it?"

"Rum raisin. Um, it's made by crushing rum-soaked raisins and mixing them into the ice cream."

Asama's eyes widened slightly. And...

"Um."

"Yeah?"

"I'll be eating it right here, won't I? ...Which would be the more mature choice?"

"I guess the rum raisin one because of the rum."

"I thought so... Ah ha ha. I'll take two of those."

"Sure thing," said Toori while pressing the ice cream into two cones.

"I-isn't that a little much?"

"Business isn't exactly booming here and we're under quarantine, so I couldn't bring it back anyway."

"Then is it really safe to eat?" she asked as he held out the ice cream. "So how much is two cones?"

"Telling someone you'll treat them and then having them insist on paying is pretty humiliating for a guy, you know?"

"In that case." Asama thought for a moment. "I'll let you pay for one of them."

Asama heard Toori agree to that suggestion.

"That'll be 200 yen."

"Then will this cover it?"

She held out two coins and he stared at them with a straight face. And after a

bit...

“That was quite the response there. Really makes you sound like part of the out-of-touch upper class.”

“Eh!? Oh, whoops. I was so nervous I got confused! I’ll need 300 yen in change!”

She kept one of the coins and he gave her 300 yen.

She thought as she held that change.

...Yes, I really am nervous.

But she wanted to do it right, so she held up the two ice cream cones. First, the right one.

“Toori-kun? This is the one you paid for.”

“Yeah?”

He made that into a question, but answering would only let him control the conversation. So instead...

“And this is the one I bought. Got that?”

She held that one out toward him.

“Here, my treat.”

Toori accepted it.

For some reason, Asama could not look straight at him as she ate the ice cream.

Then she pulled back her tongue.

“Cold...!”

“You really are something else,” he said. “But I’m impressed you remembered something from so long ago.”

...Eh!?

Asama was speechless.

A dull, heated sweat dripped down her back.

“U-um, what thing from so long ago?”

“ ‘I can eat it because you purified it, Asama.’ ”

It was exactly what she had thought.

...Wow...!

She could not speak a word, so he smiled bitterly.

“I was wondering if you still remembered, so I decided to treat you.”

“B-but, Toori-kun, why!?”

“Because I promised,” he said. “That was about 10 years ago, wasn’t it? I still remember it pretty well. I made a lot of other promises with you too, like with the contract and stuff.”

That only made her blush more.

“U-um, Toori-kun? Do you plan to keep your old promises with me?”

“Yeah. I mean,” he put a hand on his cheek and spoke in an affected way, “I will be a king.”

Asama felt her heart skip a beat at that.

At the end of its battle, the Non-Dragon Sword born from Musashi had turned back toward the stern.

Anything born of the ley lines would know that land and have seen what happened there. So...

“Yes, you are a king, aren’t you?”

“You got that right. I’ll come through on those promises when you least expect it, so don’t you forget them.”

“When I least expect it?”

“Judge. That’ll make you happier, right?”

If so, she thought. I don't have to expect anything of him.

No, she was certain he would grant her wishes whether she expected anything of him or not.

...So even if we do things differently, it would be best to stay carefree.

He was a hopeless person, but to her, he was more than that. He was...

“————”

She decided to stop her thoughts there and make it a “promise”.

When he did eventually keep that promise, she could think back to this time.

A lot was bound to happen in the meantime. For example, what would happen between him and the Blue Thunder's automaton, P-01s? So instead of worrying about what was to come...

...I'm glad.

He had kept a promise from a decade ago.

“Hee hee.”

It was funny. It had bothered her so much and she had hoped so much it could happen even if he had forgotten, but now it had happened so easily and she knew they had felt the same way about it.

“Hee hee...”

It was so funny she laughed until she cried. She decided to think of them as tears of laughter.

The ice cream was sweet and warm in her throat, but it tasted of alcohol on her tongue.

...This is because I made and drank sacred sake back then.

He thought that was a mature thing to do, so he gave me rum raisin. But if that was true...

...Ah, Toori-kun thought I was mature...

Did that give her some kind of advantage? He had turned away from her to chop up some garlic chives, but he asked a sudden question.

“Aren’t you going to play an encore?”

“No, our instruments were completely destroyed. I need to apologize to dad for that.”

“Then can you sing here? You had an encore song prepared, right? Sis mentioned it.”

...Kimi!

There’s no way out now, she thought while glancing around.

No one else was around and she did not mind even if there were. So...

“Then, um, just right here, okay?”

She quickly fixed her collar, took a breath, and cleared her throat.

Calm down, she told herself while speaking to him.

“It is called Kimitoasamade.”

Asama sang.

The song described the night on which she first decided to start a band.

“The sky is windy like usual.”

These were the lyrics she thought of while walking.

“I can see the night once more.”

They had changed form a bit since then.

“But my heart will not stop.”

Kimi opened a sign frame while watching the sleeping Cerberus with Mitotsudaira.

It contained Asama’s lyrics.

It was the song they had set aside for an encore and she sang it along with Mitotsudaira.

“It occurs to me during class.”

“The scent of hair and the sky overhead.”

How much did that girl keep inside?

“The view out the window sets my heart aflutter.”

Asama had gotten help from Kimi to write the melody. They had practiced with Mitotsudaira, so they all knew the flow of the song. From here on, the song grew restrained while also building up.

“When I think about it, I can feel my pulse.”

“That usual joyful feeling.”

“That alone changes the position of my heart.”

Silly girl, thought Kimi.

...You’re only talking about a slight change to the usual.

But what you really want is a much bigger than that.

Asama sang.

The song described when she had confided in Kimi and Mitotsudaira that she wanted to start a band.

“What to do after school?”

That had been a lot of trouble.

“Walking home with you again.”

She had been desperate about so very much. But...

“But my heart will not stop.”

She sang.

“The pale scarlet of sunset.”

If the others had not been there, she might have simply panicked.

“I face the darkening night.”

She would have been left behind by everything happening around her.

“Even the unseen sky is in a rush.”

But that was not what had happened.

“Let’s make things a little different.”

There had been so much excitement around her.

“Let’s place our futons by the window.”

Oh, I invented this part.

“So we can lie there looking up at the night sky.”

That wouldn’t be possible with how my house is built, she thought while continuing to sing.

Mitotsudaira smiled bitterly at the fact that Asama was capable of trying to look good in her imagination. But...

“An excited voice speaks in my heart.”

When Asama had made that confession below the bridge, when they had spent the night to discuss it, and...

“Once it starts, the fire blazes bright.”

...when they had such stupid fun in the bathhouse.

“I bring my hands together and undo the clasp.”

Mitotsudaira had felt the same excitement in her heart.

“I know I’m asking for the impossible.”

They both needed each other.

“But I will set even more fires burning.”

That’s right, thought Mitotsudaira.

“The wind in the trees blows through my heart.”

Asama’s hidden heart had set a fire in their hearts.

Asama sang.

The song described when they had all decided to start a band.

“Walking to school with you.”

Things had changed.

“Our hair dancing in the wind is a melody.”

Everything she saw and heard now had a connection to the band.

“Our steps up the stairs are a rhythm.”

Even those little things were fun.

“The sound of flipping textbook pages.”

That exciting sensation may have been a recent discovery for her.

“And when we look out the window together.”

She was ashamed to admit she had even wished class would end more quickly.

“The sky is shining brightly.”

Kimi thought about the past several days.

“The sunset turns to night.”

They had slept over every night to plan for the Gagaku Festival.

“The unseen sky.”

At some point, their worries had transformed into enjoyment. So...

“Looks so lovely as we walk together.”

When they slept over, they always ended up in the futons.

“By the window with you.”

Liar, thought Kimi with an inner smile. We were in the center of the room. Oh, but with her room, pretty much anything could count as “by the window”. Still, every night was a big gathering of girls.

“Our hair spills out as we lie around.”

They had thought for a long time about how to make this exciting. They had decided it would be best to describe what made them excited.

“A racing pulse explained through words.”

That was time well spent, thought Kimi.

Asama sang.

The song described what was to come – what was sure to come for the rest of her life.

“I cannot even see the stars.”

But even on the Musashi...

“I trust in you and my dream.”

That made her blush when she recalled what had happened earlier. But...

“The wind in my heart is forever changing.”

That was about the future, but for now...

...Yes.

She sang while thinking about what was happening now.

“The sky is windy like usual.”

But what counted as “usual” had changed.

“A fire burns in the night.”

A hopeless person had reminded her of the past. However...

“It started by being with you.”

Yes. And now...

“That will not change.”

Toori nodded while listening to Asama.

...I need to do things right.

Lately, he had been thinking about a few different paths for his future, but to do any of them right would require a lot of work, a lot of diligence, and a lot of improvement on his part. However...

...I'm a king.

With that thought, he gave himself over to Asama's song like it was embracing him.

Just then, he saw a familiar figure in the distance.

It was Asama's father.

He stood on a corner of the deck, but he was clearly listening to Asama's song. And...

...Huh?

A woman stood next to him.

But that woman, who was surrounded in ether light, was not among the living.

She looked a lot like Asama. Just like her husband, she was likely here to see her daughter.

...Don't worry.

Your daughter's doing things right. I need to work on that myself. When he gave a mental bow in her direction, the woman noticed him while apparently listening to Asama's song.

She gave a slight bow and then raised her index finger in front of her nose. She apparently wanted to keep this a secret.

And Asama finished her song.

Asama took a breath and faced forward. She was aware how nervous she was.

"Um, that's about it."

“Yeah,” he said. “It’s a nice song to listen to. It really sets a mood that makes me want to get started on something too.”

“Can you please keep it short?”

“Then...could you only sing it for me from now on? It’d be a shame not to.”

Asama felt heat rising from her neck and she could not stop her mouth from spreading horizontally.

“But, well, um, that’s not really possible. Kimi and Mito can sing it too...”

“Yeah, I was just saying what I’d like. I don’t really expect you to do it.”

She was really glad he kept it at that.

“But,” he said. “You didn’t really get to perform today, so will you keep doing this?”

“Eh? Y-yes. Mito and Kimi said this was a real disappointment too. ...And I enjoyed it, so I want to keep doing this while having fun with everyone.”

“Will the Asama Shrine be able to take it?”

“That won’t be a problem.”

By this point, she was used to it all and could say something like that. That may have been the biggest change for her. But in her current mood, she knew just what to say: “I’ll make sure we don’t just use my place next time.”

“Huh?”

He tilted his head forward, so she took a bite of her ice cream. She let the alcohol flavor envelop her tongue and she smiled.

“You won’t get a moment’s peace, so I hope you’re ready.”

Final Chapter: Musashi's Songstresses

最終章

『武蔵の歌姫達』



EM
一体全体
どうしてここまで
ずれているのに
噛み合うのか
配点 (しょうがないですから)

How in the world

Do we get along so well

When we are

So out of sync?

Point Allocation (We Have No Choice)

...I feel like I said something really noteworthy last night...

Bring that mood back! Bring it back to me! thought Asama, but it was no use. The more she thought about it, the higher her temperature grew and the more she sweated.

Mitotsudaira tilted her head in the next seat over.

“Tomo? You’re going to regret it if you don’t decide what to order soon.”

That was true.

They were in the Blue Thunder. They had wanted to celebrate after the Gagaku Festival the night before, but that had not worked out. Instead...

“Heh heh. I ended up falling asleep in Asama’s spring, but what happened to me afterwards? When I woke up, I was in her room and wearing a yukata, so who knows what kind of naughty things she did to me while I was asleep. Ahhh, the Sailboat!”

“I did nothing of the sort!”

Asama realized everyone was glaring at her.

Eh? She was confused for a few seconds before frantically speaking up.

“W-wait! I wasn’t talking about the Sailboat! I wasn’t talking about that!”

“Does it make any difference?” asked Naito with a bitter smile. She and Naruze looked like they had slept well. “It was a good thing we prepared in advance. Right, Ga-chan?”

“Yes. We messed up by leaving the door open again, but we sure got a good night’s sleep.”

Asama was curious what they were talking about, but she decided it was best not to ask.

Still, she had a lot she needed to do now.

“Um, Mito? I put the Cerberus in the Asama Shrine’s Mouse management system, so I’m getting reports on her. She’s going to enter hibernation while we supply her with ether. There will be reports at the important intervals, so I’ll forward those to you.”

“Judge. I was always thinking I would get a Mouse to help me serve my king, but it looks like that won’t be for a while.”

Asama realized Mitotsudaira talked about being a knight and having a king a lot more than she used to. And...

“Naito and Naruze, Musashi’s port authority has given you permission to use the divine network. Wild Kamelie still has a contract for this year, so when you account for the handover process, it should start partway through next year.”

“What can we use that for?” asked Naruze.

Oh, dear, thought Asama.

“You do a divine radio show for Musashi. That’s apparently what the representative does.”

“Wild Kamelie was doing that?”

“You apparently don’t have to do it. It’s a privilege. So will you do it?”

“Next year, huh?”

Naruze crossed her arms and Naito started making suggestions with a smile. Asama knew they would agree to do it, but then Kimi tugged on her sleeve.

“What do you have for me!? Eh? Are you saying you want me to grope your boobs!? You are, aren’t you!? ...Well, if you insist. Ready? Oops, that was your crotch! Finger thermometer!”

“What do you think you’re doing!?”

“Then give me somethiiiiing!”

Kimi held out her hands, so Asama gave her the powdered water that was

sitting on the table.

“The worst part about this is I can’t say it isn’t useful,” complained Kimi.

“I thought the same thing when I saw it here...”

Mitotsudaira laughed at that.

She narrowed her eyes, looked to Kimi, looked to Asama, and looked to Naito and Naruze.

“Then how about giving us all the same present? ...The reconstruction of Tama’s atrium park should be complete by the 12th next month.”

That was about a month away, but what did that matter? Then Asama remembered their previous date.

“If there will be an ice cream stand there, I can accompany you properly this time.”

“Oh?”

Mitotsudaira and Kimi exchanged a glance.

Kimi gave a small but unmistakable nod, so Mitotsudaira thought to herself.

...I don’t know when she dealt with that, but I’m glad she’s gotten over her ice cream issue.

An old regret between Mitotsudaira’s king and Asama was no more.

The king of Remorse Way had erased someone else’s remorse.

...He really is something.

She smiled bitterly in her heart, but she was the same.

She was neglecting herself to help out others.

And she was fine with that being her form of justice.

With that in mind, she spoke to Asama.

“Then the three of us can try again there. ...And we can invite my king as well.”

Asama listened to Mitotsudaira.

“Representatives of Musashi’s shops are holding a music festival in the Tama park. It will last three days and the third day is modern music like we play.”

“Hold on,” said Naito as she opened a Magie Figur and checked her divine transmissions. “Oh, you’re right! It said Reconstruction Festival at the top, so I ignored it!”

“What, do you want a rematch with us? You’ll regret underestimating Technohexen.”

“Heh heh. You’re on. But...” Kimi looked to Mitotsudaira. “What shop will we be representing? Mitotsudaira’s company? A restaurant?”

“That’s the problem. Only normal street shops are allowed to participate, so that rules out companies and shops owned by knights like me.”

“Oh, dear. Then we have no way to participate at the moment?”

“Judge. I brought it up so we could figure out what to do.”

Kimi asked another question after that.

“Will we be writing a new song?”

She did not ask if they would be participating. That went without saying.

And if they did write a new song like Kimi suggested...

...I really will have only sung that song for Toori-kun!

Asama noticed the usual narrow-eyed smile on Kimi’s face.

She wanted to believe that girl had not heard the previous night’s conversation. So...

“Y-yes, let’s do that. Let’s write a new song. That sounds good!”

“Tomo, why do you sound so awkward here?”

“Calm down.” Asama took a breath. “Okay, now we need to figure out what shop we can represent.”

Just then, a quiet figure walked over from the kitchen.

It was P-01s.

Kimi, who sat by the aisle, watched as P-01s bowed to them all.

“First of all, I have some good news and some awful news for Asama-sama.”

“Eh!? Right off the bat? And for me specifically!?”

“Judge.” The automaton nodded. And, “This is the good news: I have made a new version of the powdered water. I hear you used some last night, so please take it.”

They hung their heads when a chartula was placed in front of each of them instead of just Asama.

...That's what I'm talking about.

Foolish brother, you don't just end up on the receiving end of this when you visit, I hope.

I would feel sorry for him, but it might be fun, she thought as P-01s moved again. She placed a single pamphlet on the table.

“And this is the awful news: During the music festival in Tama's atrium park, the Blue Thunder would like your band to represent us.”

...Huh?

Asama looked down at the pamphlet.

“You want us to be the Blue Thunder representative for this?”

“Judge. ...Oh, and the manager has already made up her mind, so you have no choice in the matter. What do you say?”

When Mitotsudaira heard that, she stared forward and...

“———!”

She mimicked the Cerberus's bark.

That must mean she had made up her mind. *In that case*, thought Asama.

...Honestly!

“This really is awful.”

She sighed, but also smiled. Then she grabbed Kimi and Mitotsudaira’s shoulders. With her arms lightly wrapped around those shoulders, she turned all three of them toward P-01s.

Asama could not stop the smile that appeared in her eyes and mouth and she spoke clearly to P-01s.

“We will purify any news that awful, so please keep it coming. We can take care of it all.”

When she focused her ears, she could hear the rhythmical sounds of construction.

The Gagaku Festival was over and a new season was beginning.

Her usual life would resume today. But...

“—————”

They exchanged a glance and smiled. Kimi’s face said “silly girl”, Mitotsudaira’s said “I’m not sure what to say”, Naito’s said “yes, yes” and Naruze’s said “you love it, don’t you?” She sensed a smile in all of the faces here, even the new expressionless one looking down at them.

She opened her mouth while they exchanged that look.



——賑やかですから、覚悟して下さいね？

She felt like these words were her thanks to everyone.

“I can’t wait.”

Yes. After all...

“Things are going to be even more exciting from now on.”

—It’s going to be exciting, so I hope you’re ready.

Afterword

That was Kimitoasamade 4-B.

This volume brought the Gagaku Festival to a close. This story took place at a time the characters look back on in the main story, but I wanted to show you how exciting things were back then too. That group is always up to something.

Anyway, this was like having a serialization for a year and a half, so I learned a lot about pacing. It was different from serialized magazine short stories and it let me experiment in ways I can't in the main series. I am thankful to everyone involved for giving me this opportunity. After all, I knew nothing about the etiquette for writing bonus novels and it reminded me that I still have so much to learn even after a dozen or so years doing this.

I was also reminded that to create is not to "create something to give to others"; it is to "create yourself to give to others". Also, I always enjoy seeing the illustrations because there's usually something like the back shots on the covers that make me say "oh, you can do that?"

I hope to do a lot more in the future too.

Now for the chat.

"Have you at least read to 2-B?"

"Huh? I decided to wait until they put out a box set to buy it."

"Damn you!"

"Get a load of this: My dog ran away when it was snowing the other day. He left footprints in the snow, so I followed those and ended up rescuing the neighbor's dog who I found caught in a pitfall in the park."

"Can I ask what became of your dog? And don't dig pitfalls in the park."

"I didn't do it. Why would you assume that? When I got home, mine was in

front of the house and he pissed himself with happiness the instant he saw me. And he looked really proud of himself afterwards. Then one of the neighbors saw me shoveling that snow to the side of the road, but I'm pretty sure they thought I had done it. But c'mon, I don't do it in front of the house."

And where do you do it?

Anyway, thank you very much, everyone. The main story occurs about a year after this and a lot of new things lie in store for Asama and the rest of Class Plum between now and then.

Like what, you ask? The Student Council Election, the Chancellor's Officers Recommendation Exam, the School Festival, and lots more. I suppose I might write about those if I have a chance.

The background music this time was Kimitoasamade from the end of the story, but my question is, "Who did it 'fit' the most?"

And with that, I hope you will continue to follow this group's adventures.

Another snowy morning in 2013.

-Kawakami Minoru

Notes

1. ↑ The Gion of Gion Shoja can also mean onomatopoeia.
2. ↑ The line “together with you” can also be interpreted as “Tomo and Kimi”.